

Folk and Minor Art in India
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Lecture - 34
Thematic Change in Contemporary Collection
of Indian Folk and Minor Art

In this lecture, we are going to see how the theme is changing as far as the contemporary forecasts are concerned. The whole practices initiated and carried out by a group of people who have always been there, but there are many more people who are getting added to the whole activity.

Now, this is something very obvious and we discussed that in earlier times also that specially the theme change which is caused by many different factors, one of that is perhaps the inclusion of genders into it, the inclusion of the modern mind, the degree of education and the access to information, the global awareness, the kind of sensibilities that the artist already have is getting enraged by many other cross cultural and cross media exposures that they are enjoying in a regular basis and there are also subject matters who are cultural specific, beyond culture and many other factors are nurturing the basic favor of this practice in the contemporary millennium.

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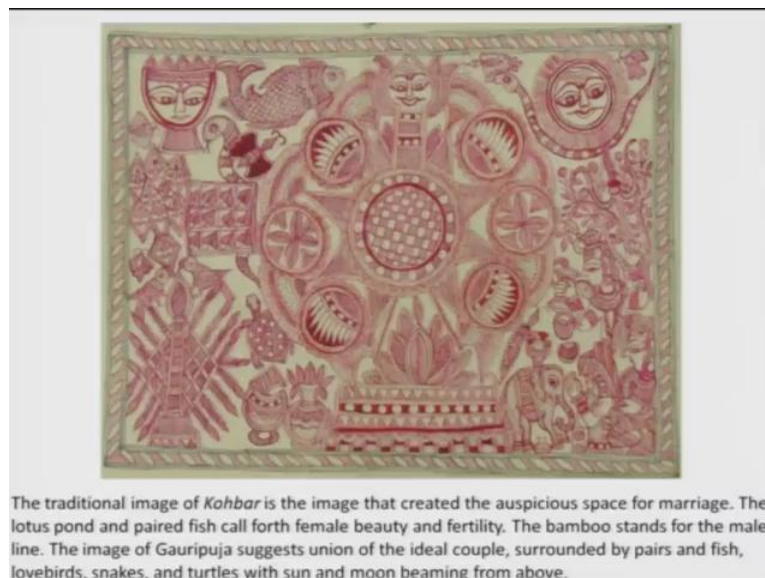
Change in theme: As explained by anthropologist David Szanton, co founder (in 1980) and president (till 2003), Ethnic Arts Foundation, 1980s onwards, several artists began painting images on social themes in Madhubani. Apart from daily life activities there were paintings depicting political events such as election, by Shanti Devi (the art work is now preserved in Berkeley Art Museum) having political party symbols.

The male painters are regular in secular themes and painting on current issues. The thematic range include global terrorism, pollution, patriarchy, global terrorism, benefit and costs of capitalist development, woman power and glory, literacy mission etc.

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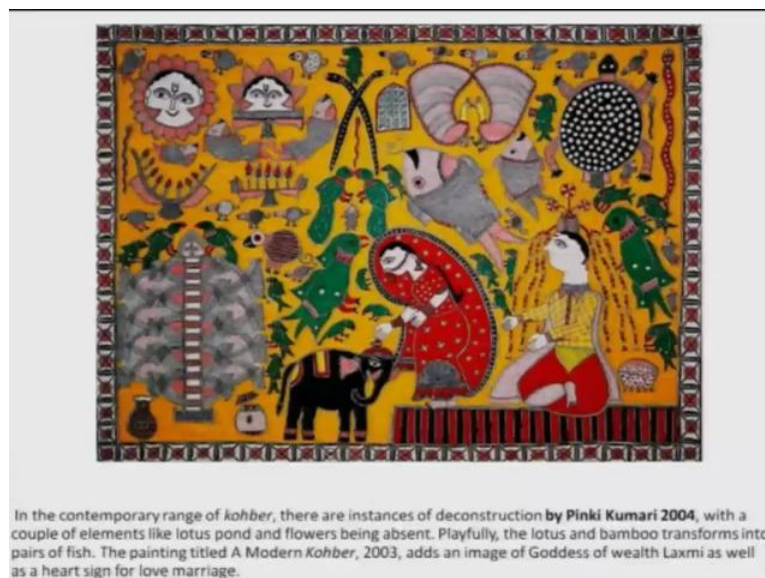


Seeing in the picture is the traditional Kohbar which is an image that is usually done during the auspicious ceremonies and is part of a ritualistic practice, a traditional one in Madhubani. The traditional image of Kohbar is the image that created the auspicious space for marriage. The lotus pond and paired fish call forth female beauty and fertility. The bamboo stands for the male line. The image of Gauripuja suggests union of the ideal couple, surrounded by pairs of fish, lovebirds, snakes and turtles with sun and moon beaming from above. In this picture, what we see is a centralized chamber and there are other things coming out in a radial order. So, it is a radiating condition that operates the

compositional arrangement and there are other elements which are highly symbolic and culture specific, but also at the same time very esthetically pleasing that are placed there.

So, when we see in one side the repeated leaves or the faces and some geometrical pattern, it does not tell us anything very specifically but it introits us to find out the meaning to know the people who have made it, how they leave, what is their culture and how the life is. So, this is the representation of life in a particular zone which is full of prosperity. It is the combination of reality, imagination, belief and many other things, but this is restricted towards quite a few factors that the composition should have certain things very compulsorily. Now I will show you another Kohber which has turned in a recent time.

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So, in the contemporary range of Kohbar, there are instances of deconstruction by Pinki Kumari in 2004 with a couple of elements like lotus pond and flowers being absent. Playfully, the lotus and bamboo transforms into pairs of fish. The painting titled a *Modern Kohber*, 2003 adds an image of Goddess of wealth Laxmi as well as a heart sign for love marriage. So, the space division is different and the symmetry is broken and dismantled, the imageries are more or less the same and some of the patterns are just as it is, but the images are not restricted to the symmetry and the creative freedom is abundant here.

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This is another very conventional picture of the village life which is done by Dulari Devi. So, in this picture we see that it is a regular village life. In the first frame on top, we see that there is one character who is almost like the childhood image of Krishna, but it is a common village boy who is just the symbol of Krishna there and he is sitting on the tree and playing a flute and then there is one lady who is sitting underneath the tree and selling fish and she is a fish seller and she is holding in her hand a small child. So, she is the mother and she is sitting with the measuring machine and doing her business and there are other people around her and the whole buying selling thing is going on and there are also coins left there.

Fish selling is there in the first frame and then we see that they are coming back home, mothers are there with children and there are many other children playing around, There are animals, snakes and everything who are all living together and there is one character who is cooking, the other one is also assisting her in many different ways. In the third picture, also we see that the cooking and other daily life activities are going on and the male members are out, if for harvest they are working in the field, the women of the community are carrying food and the couple is sitting under the tree and the tree is also full of beautiful fruits. There are juicy fruits we can see from the colors whether the orange and yellow, the tree is also full of beautiful birds and the couple is sitting right underneath the tree and enjoying the food together.

There are other people, cattle's and everything that shows the prosperity and the happy life and there are other images that shows the prosperity and the happy life and then in the second last frame, we see that suddenly there is a child who is affected by a snake bite and there are also lake boat, a water vehicle that is shown which is rushed to shift. So, the entire community is shifting to a different location for some reason and they are doing many other things and it is again showing that its life is not just a smooth sales and one has to get ready for that and there is some turmoil which is taking place and this is how we are making the meaning of the images and then again the common motives of prosperity, their helter and shelter and we get to say the crab, the turtle, fish and all are the typical motives of Madhubani painting.

Then in the last frame, also we see that they are getting like they are storing certain things for their use and they are in a way moving from one place to another place. So, this is kind of a utopian picture of the village life and the crisis that comes in the second frame and it is part of a narrative at the same time and each frame is individual in their identity and moreover, it has a strong identity that can be easily recognizable as a Madhubani painting. So, all the motives, all the brand identities that come with Madhubani painting are very straightly maintained all throughout and at the same time the artist has taken all her freedom to decorate it, to arrange it in whatever way she felt like.

So, the medium, the color, the pictorial elements and images which is very rich and it also provides the artist with a lot of visual possibilities and the artistic possibilities, the expressions are also there, see the kind of decorative qualities and the draperies and there are different decorations on the textile, the tree is need in a very free decorative simplified structure, the textures are almost everywhere and its very rich as a and rich at the same time, it is very pleasing for our eyes. Now, this is a conventional or may be a semi conventional transition of the picture that we have seen traditionally. It is not made for the ritualistic purpose rather, this is for an individual expression of Dulari Devi which we get to see here and it is partly her memory and her wish and partly her apprehension, everything is there in this picture.

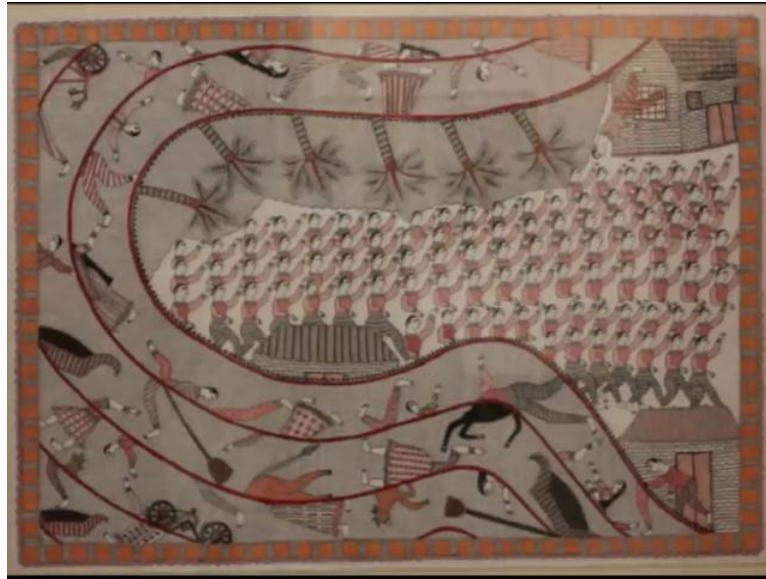
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Now, I will show you another picture which is a recent one and this is perhaps even more interesting to look at. In the beginning, we see this is the title of the painting is bride to bride burning and the painter's names Roopam Kumari executed in 2012 in Madhubani. So, what we see in the picture is a girl who is getting married in the first frame if we go in the order from left to right and then top to bottom. We see that she is getting married and she is getting ducted some, two girls are applying mehndi on her hands and she is getting dressed up and there is lots of food being prepared for the guests and there are abundant of material all over her. It is an image of prosperity then the bridegroom comes and she gets married everybody is blessing them and showering them with blessings.

There are also images where there is a little girl and other people who are clicking photographs. There are three four images and there are characters who are photographers and all ladies are clicking photographs and capturing the moments which are very interesting and almost everywhere it is like the allegory that all this photographers are coming in and photographer is getting clicked and then in the third frame we see that they are also attending all the ritualistic things which is suggested by the Shastra and all those religious text that the marriage can only be prosperous if all this rituals are nicely performed.

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So, they are going through each and everything suggested with lots of faith and understanding and then finally, what is happening in the fourth frame, we see that the bride is heading towards the bridegrooms house. When she is traveling by a palanquin, we can see the bride is sitting inside and there are also some village scenes where a person is going with some milk sellers and other people are there all around them and then finally, in the second last frame where Roopam has also signed there and it is like art by Roopam done in 2012. So, here we see that the girl is trying to get adjusted to all the household activities, the household work in straight instructions from the mother in law there. So, we see a two well from where they fetch water and then there is a kitchen setup and as seen in the picture, she is trying to clean up the space with the broom that she is holding and wiping up all the dirt's from the floor.

So, she is trying to be as good as possible but the mother in law does not look very happy with her and then shockingly at the last frame we see that there is a bridegroom and the mother in law at both the sides and the girl again she is sitting in the same posture how she sat in the first frame. It is the same girl with no change and she is sitting there, tear is falling from her eyes and she is sitting with all the utensils of the kitchen, the strainer, the cup and saucer and the other utensils everything is lying there disorganized and the husband is pouring oil, it is also written that its mitti ka thel that means, it is kerosene and the mother in law is there with the match box. So, bride to bride burning is a strong image when we compare it with the earlier one that we have seen from Dulari Devi, it

has the same sensibility and she showed some apprehension of shifting or a snake bite. So, the fear is always there with the usual utopia and sees the whole image does not really look like it will come up with such a strong message which is very difficult to accept, but this is the contemporary face of an Indian folk art.

What we see in this picture is also something which is in respond to a recent phenomenon by Amrutha das, the Srilanka tsunami painted in 2004. So, the entire image of the wave and the coconut trees are all highly patronized and texture, the figures who are running are trying to escape and then the bodies which are in different parts and it is an amazing composition very unconventional and very strictly connected to the sensibilities of Madhubani paintings. So, the style is intact and the expression is individualistic and it is very interesting to see how the textures are created and all the people are rushing and there is that reputation of eager which gives us the right rhythm and then the bodies are in parts and fragments totally taken over by the huge wave that is the tsunami coming from one side. So, it is a reaction and expression which is very individual in its characteristic.

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Then we see this painting by Shalini Kumari, the benefits and costs of capitalism, I will read the description that is mentioned in the prize list of the international travelling exhibition, the central swastika figure symbolizes capitalist prosperity that produces the green revolution, industrialization, globalized trades and consumer goods, the light and

education which all brighten the world, but on either side, it also produces rockets, guns, alcohol, drugs and diseases, auto form a noise pollution and cosmetics which all darken the world creating toxins, the past on the Shiva, but can we again allow the toxins and again save humanity?

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Another image from a recent time, what we see in the picture is an ongoing ultrasound x ray of an expected mother, a skilled up and emphasized motive of snake symbolizes the horror of female feticide.

There are image of girl children compared with beautiful flowers which are picked up from the twigs with savory brutality. The artist did not seem to have followed the conventional compositional norms and yet have maintained the core characteristic of Madhubani painting style in the fine linear work with utter intricacy. This is the painting made by Rani Jha and the title of the painting is the abortion clinic painted in 2004.

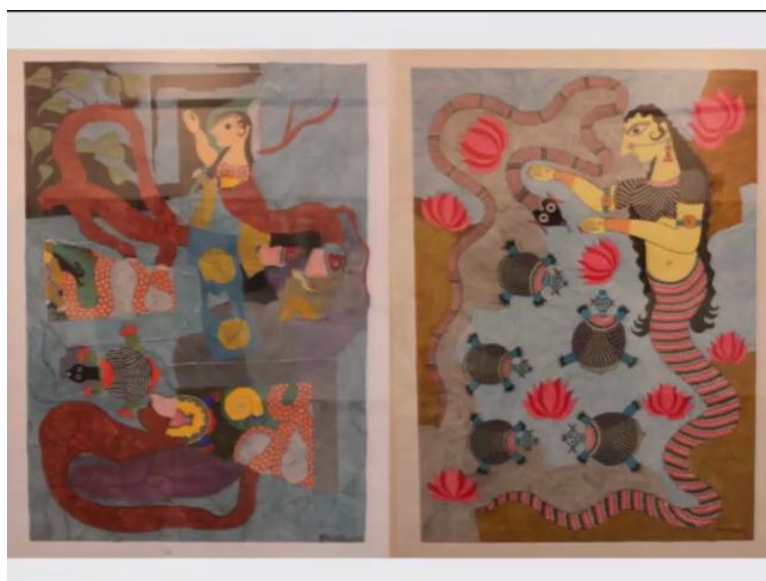
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Some recent works by Pushpa Kumari on the same feminine subject matters where the female is embodied as the mother goddess and the mother who is giving birth to the children in all unfavorable conditions and contexts.

So, it is all about the child birth, the motherhood and all the symbols which is related to prosperity and how they are in the time of change and how they are endangered from time.

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I will also show you two of the very interesting representations in the paintings of a very talented young painter from Madhubani named Rambharas Jha. So, in the painting which is there at the left, what we get to see is a collage which is very different and it is very rare to see collage like formation in Madhubani painting. At the same time, the painting has all the stylistic identities that Madhubani painting usually has. In this painting, we see that it has some kind of a dream like condition where Rambharas Jha has named this painting under water montage and he painted it in 2005.

So, in this picture what we see which is unlike the other one and in the next which is also a similar expression where there is a mermaid kind of a figure who is half snake and it is the Nagakanya or the snake maiden who is seen in the picture and there is a snake and the kind of space deviation with the lotus and everything, but it also has a highly surreal aspect where the artist is taken all his freedom of execution and at the same time he is representing the style of Madhubani painting in a much modern manner.

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These are the two very significant paintings by Rambharas Jha which is almost abstract and it does not have much of a representational image into it and they are semi abstract and we can call it fully abstract, highly textured in layers and it has the basic linearity of Madhubani paintings. So, it has Khachni, Bharni and all these traditional things, but they are interpreted in a very modern term.

So, in the painting titled outside inside and transformation and breaking earth, Rambharas has enjoyed his artistic freedom by experimenting and exploring the traditional style in his contemporary expression.

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Amrutha Jha, a young Madhubani painter has been innovatively exploring the possibilities of Madhubani tradition in her new works and Amrutha Jha taking the concept of Ardhanarishwara a state further and in this painting is a face of a tiger and the other one she named it as the strange birds.

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Now, the Ardhanarishwara motive that is shown in the picture, it is the Prakruthi and Purusha, the opposite and complementary concept to her if male and female are independent and complementary amongst gods and humans, they must be also throughout the nature. Shalini Kumari's drawings on Ardhanarishwara, the idea of complementary and interdependence, she depicts two aspects of women radiating power and energy into the dark world.

So, we see two women and another snake in the form of blessing and the work is completely a symmetrical in state of being symmetrical as the Ardhanarishwar things usually have then it has an symmetrical emphases into it, but then the radiating power and energy into the dark world as we said with head board also sexually and socially submissive to the Naga that is the symbol of the male power, the males in her life. So, the snake is symbolizing the male counterpart the Naga, the snake on the females, probably a self image.

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So, on the female's forehead as interpreted by the artist is, according to her she says they have even captured our minds. They are totally taken over and they are just getting under a scheme. Amrutha Jha, she tells a same concept and she says if the Ardhanarishwar concept, the opposite complementary male female is existing in the nature then why not in snails. So, she picked up the motive of the creature snail and simplified it and expressed it in this form and all this contemporary images are very unique and

experimental in their quality and I just took examples from Madhubani, but there are other things happening all over in our country specially in the Western India, in Bengal and north India also where they are bringing new subject matters experimenting with the style. So, they are basically using style as a general identity for them and experimenting, the style incorporating changes and taking the tradition further very successfully.