



The feminine principle in *Cohber* painting: A case of Mithila cultural study

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Abstract

Mithila painting is more than an art. Through this creative art, a group of women express their desires, dreams, expectations, hopes and aspirations to the people. If you ask them what they are doing they will respond, “We are writing this *khobar* or *gnawer*”. (Hamralokani *khobara yaa gahavara likhait chee*) For them, their style of art is a kind of script through which they communicate with the male folk or with the people of the rest of the world. They are the creative painter who paints their feelings through the medium of painting. They are creators and are close to god in perfection. Mithila painting is dominantly women centered but because of money, some men too have jumped into this creativity, but in its essence and nature, even today, it is women’s creativity and empowerment. Painting is a reflection and representation of human culture and life. Mithila *Cohber* painting is one of the folk arts which depict the picture of *mithila* culture and principle of women empowerment. Such a painting is mostly painted by women. The organic material used in painting represents real issue of the *mithila* society. The *Cohber* painting during weeding represents the different issue not only the sexual arouse, knowledge and issue but also theme of god, goddess, mythological and religious beliefs which leads the society powerful; medium for women to convey their feeling issue in the outer world. This research paper deals with the women condition and painting as a powerful tool to empowerment of women issue. It focuses on how *Cohber* painting have addressed the gender issue and empower the women in this work through painting.

Keywords: representation, painting, empowerment, *coher*, women, culture

Introduction

This research paper studies about the women art as a powerful tool for empowerment and representation of women in *Mithila* culture. *Cohber* painting is a cultural, and life represents of *Maithili* daily life and culture where women are differently objectify in painting but the *Cohber* painting raise the issue of women in *mithila* society and culture. This painting represents the lifestyle, lifespan and subject and object of female in this society. In *mithila* culture such painting is mostly painted by female and they share their story to empower the women issue in wide range. For over 1,500 years, women have lived oppressed lives, harbored suppressed desires. Unknowingly, women see themselves channelizing their repressed thoughts (of freedom) through the songs they sing and paintings they make for recreation, says Rani Jha, the 54-year-old Master Painter and a teacher at *Mithila Institute of Art* in *Madhubani, Bihar*. “I have lived and grown in a community where women and their opinions were never taken seriously. But it was just not acceptable to me,” she says. She started expressing her dissent in her paintings. “I wanted to start a revolution,” she says. According to these version women suppressed feelings are depicted by the painting. The progressive commercialization of this art has resulted in the corrosion of this pristine variety of art - in form as well as content and *Kohbar* nuptials chamber (wedding) painting is full of symbols which include all aspects of *Maithili* life with its wisdom full of practical meaning.

Literature review and analysis of painting:

Rationale of the Study

This Research carried out on *Mithila* painting and culture has

especially focused on gendered biased, myths and rituals. Contrary to these, this research has traced out types of painting culture and women status. It also explores the interrelationship between painting and culture and socio-cultural life of *Maithili* women. It highlights the important aspects of the performative culture in *Maithili* women that preserve the cultural heritage on the verge of extinct. The interpretation and analysis of the painting style would be the matter of great importance for the academic field and future researchers interested cultural studies.

In addition, the study will be very useful and important source of academicians and researchers in the future. It also disseminates awareness and knowledge among *Maithili* community about the importance of cultural assets. It would also open up a room for further research in socio-cultural studies and adds new spheres in the field.

Objectives

The major objectives of this research article are

- To identify and enumerate types of *Mithila* paintings,
- To find out the interrelationship between paintings with socio-cultural values and women empowerment
- To interpret the painting and *Maithili* culture

Conceptual Frameworks

This research paper has primarily been based on socio-cultural theory of Victor Turner and the magical perspective of rituals by Luc Sala for its conceptual interpretation. Likewise, it has incorporated the recent trend-analysis tools of Vequaud, The Art of *Mithila* in relation to *Maithili* socio culture and women status.

Rationale of the Study

Researches especially focused on culture painting relation and women empowerment, myths and rituals. Contrary to these, this research has traced out types of *painting*. It also explores the interrelationship between *paintings* and socio-cultural life of mithila women. It highlights the important aspects of the performative culture that preserve the cultural heritage on the verge of extinct.

Delimitation of the study

The study has focused on the painting performative and their varieties of performance for the analysis and interpretation. It has basically identified the kohber and madhubani painting and songs about how their interrelationship with women status as well as culture. It also interprets how the painting performance skills and songs are deeply rooted with and socio-cultural lives. This study mainly concentrates on the interpretation of the *women painting* As a matter of fact, the research is based on primary and secondary sources. The primary data have been collected in Janakpur women development centre (JWDC). For the interpretation of data collected, the library research has been conducted and interview and focused group discussion has been held with knowledgeable elderly experts.

Analysis of painting and socio cultural aspect of Maithili culture

Painting is an important medium for the expression of creative thoughts, human feelings, emotions and sentiments as well as the secular themes, religious beliefs and multicolored usual subject matters. As such, the study of painting concerning the genre of the folk-art helps us in understanding the deep correlation between art and the various facets of the respective culture, civilization and women empowerment in the outer sphere. Because basically Mithila painting and art is belonging to collective women work of art where they design subjectivity of their issue. Mishra states that:

Mithila painting is a more than art. Through the creative art; a group of women expresses their desire, dreams, expectations, hope and aspiration to the people. If you ask them what are they doing they will respond "we are writing this cohbera yaa gahavara likhait chhe" for them their style of art is a kind of script through which they communicate with the male folk or with the people of the rest of the world. (102)

The collective work of art and performance is a powerful weapon to share and express their issue in the outer world which spread the women issue in widespread and empower the women in mithila society whether psychologically or economically. Such kind of painting makes women relief and sexual expression towards other because mithila society is a patriarchal in one way and on the other hand matriarchal too. But when we see them as a patriarchal they express their inner desire toward family society and outer world through painting because most of the mithla cutler women are not allowed to perform outer work.

It is not a question of bringing about a revolution against tradition but in other Words, feminine voices of good sense are not thinking of or wanting to tear away the Jobs and positions from men, turning on its head the relation of power between the Sexes and women with the femininity. A realistic

objective could be that of opening the doors of women that they can offer their contribution in terms of Skills and also sensitivity, intuition, passion, dedication, in full collaboration and Integration. In Mithila, girls were not given education as parents thought they had to do only house hold work in comparison to boys. They would also think that after giving education to girls, they will have to pay big dowry for their marriage. The lack of education for girl has been shown in the painting of Vinita Jha.



Fig 1: Vinita Jha

In this painting the girl is taking part in household chores and helping her mother in grinding the grains while the male child is sent to school. This was prevalent across all castes in Mithila. So this painting is a milestone for the women to come out in other area and aware the people for their education. Putting it in an excessively simplified way, we can affirm that the generative.

Path is divided into four moments: desiring, bringing into the world, looking after,

And finally, letting go. So it is a generativity that, as an original awareness activities

And symbolic code, it is also seen in pedagogical spaces (education in faith, pastoral

Activity, schooling) giving life to social, cultural and economic structures that are

Inspired by values, ideas, principles and practices oriented to the common Mithila society, to

The whole development of women empowerment. Mishra state in his writing

Their style of art is a kind of script through which they communicate with the male folk or with the people of the rest of the world. They are the creative writers who write their feelings through the medium of painting. They are creators and are close to god in perfection. Because of money, some men too have jumped into this creativity, but in its essence and nature, even today, it is women's creativity. (102)

So, the medium of women development and the improving creativity is painting. They are not only expressing their thought, emotion and dream in painting they are developing their creativity, generating income and coming outer world. Mithila is male dominated society where most of the women works at their home and male for outside. Because of the child marriage they don't have sex education and they cannot express their desire easily. In this context, ramvaros kapadi in this article in the journal mirmire, remarks: "Mithila is always a male dominated society where talking about 'sex awareness'

is very difficulty especially with women. Therefore symbolic message about sexual power and its significance is in kohber drawing"(150). Women narrating their inner story, desire and emotion through paintings. The symbol of this painting is depending on the higher and lower cast as well.

in the modern days the painting paradigm is sifting for commercialization and male also involve in painting with the issue of female which is the milestone for the women to uplift in their society and outer sphere too. S.C. Suman painting is one of a representation.



Fig 2: S.C. Suman

This kohbar painting includes different symbolic expression that conveys special meanings according to the organic icons used there in Kohbar painting. Beside, parrot, tortoises, and fish are drawn representing love, longevity, and fertility respectively. In addition, Sun, Moon, Panchant Devta, and Nabgraha are drawn reflecting life given energy. A woman at the four corners of kohbar ghar painted Naia-jogin signifies freedom from tantra-mantra who frees the couple from evil magic. Likewise, Lotus flower donates love and tender and leaf of Purain symbolizes female sex. The tradition of the Kohbar harks back to a time when child marriages flourishes and was non-existent which were consecrated to celebrate the spiritual and physical union between the newlyweds. Every element in Mithila painting he's deeply rooted symbolism in it focusing around passion, sex, fertility and tantric ritual. The deeper meaning links it with the transcendental quality the icons convey while the surface meaning connects it with the changing context of the painting. Campoli writers; "branch of bamboo alluding to the male or phallic principle, is surrounded by lotus leaves, symbolizing the Yoni the female element"."Kalpvriksha-Latpatuaa suga (pair of parrot)." the issue of all symbolic meaning focus more in women yoni because it is the beginning of lifecycle. Kalpvriksha, the tree of life, also meaning "word tree" finds mention in the Vadic scripture. In the earliest account of the Samudra Manthan. It is on account of this wish-granting tree.

The motif and organ of Kohber-Ghar contains Latpatua suga on the Kalpvrikcha is symbolic presentation of wish-granting tree for safety, wisdom, health, happiness and Latpatua-suga for love and life. It also explores the interrelationship between Sakela Silies and socio-cultural life and nature.

It highlights the important aspects of the performative culture in mathili women that preserve the cultural heritage on the verge of extinct. The interpretation and analysis of the painting style would be the matter of great importance for the academic field and future researchers interested cultural studies. In addition, the study will be very useful and important source of academicians and researchers in the future. It also disseminates awareness and knowledge among mithila community about the importance of cultural assets. It would also open up a room for further research in socio-cultural studies and adds new spheres in the fields; it is one of the open door for women principle of empowerment.

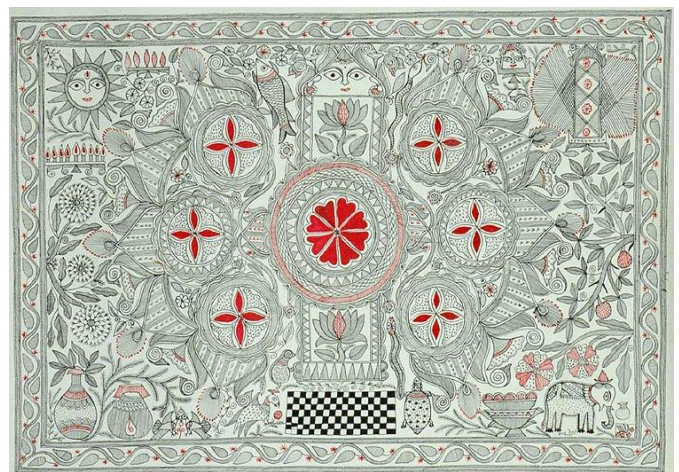


Fig 3: Rani Jha

These paintings are wonderfully depicted and express their artistic sentiments and skills on various occasions. every painting in every occasion has vary meaning and such as the wedding ceremony is a special occasion in Maithili society, which is also known as "Kohabar" within the community, a separate room is set and decorated tastefully with several arts for its celebration. This painting is done in the inner as well as outer walls of the Kohabar Ghar (honeymoon house). As a popular social practice, its main motto is to increase the sexual potency and fertility of both the bride and bridegroom. This special painting is drawn on the walls of the house in three places: the Gosaighar (special room for family god), the Kohabar Ghar (honeymoon room) and Kohabar-Gharak-Koniya (corridor or outside of the Kohabar Ghar) but this is not only the issue of sexuality and sexual potency but representing culture and life. The outer walls of the Kohabar are decorated with the paintings of rural life such as a palanquin with its carriers, shady fruit trees like those of mango, banana, Kadamba and Ashoka. They also paint love-scenes of Lord Krishna with the gopinis and his constant companion, Rani depicts the issue of love and care. Education and awareness in mithila culture.



Fig 4: Arati Kumara women as Mother Nature “22*30” 2011

In this picture Arati Kumari tries to show the importance of women and women is comparing with earth where all people can live and this nature is enough for all and without women civilization of human and society is impossible. There women is holding the earth and holding the earth is possible by women so such painting is leading and representing women issue in the outer world from cultural issue.



Fig 5: Rani Jha

In this painting jha is showing the development and openness of Mithila women in the outer world. Women issue is increasing day by day and there we can see the four stages of women openness and development in terms of dress and body performance.

Art in the ancient literature of Mithila can be inferred that this is a very ancient art. Such art and creation is transforming towards generation to generation and a new kind of pedagogy which aware and motivate the women. Vequaud observes that “.....this tradition was at least several decades old, if not the three millennia”. It traditionally has been the ceremonial

paintings as during various festivals and family ceremonies, the women would paint the walls of the houses and huts. This folk painting is the creativity of women folks. Thakur Upendra says- “it is an exclusive jurisdiction and monopoly of the women artists of Mithila and there is perhaps no other country in the world where folk painting is mastered by women folk only”. On the role of a woman in this art, Vequaud claims, “.... the women of Mithila and only the women have painted this folk art....” The art is carried forward from one generation to the other. Generally mother teaches the art to her daughter. Shashikala Devi (one of the famous artists Mithila Paintings) recalls, “Painting is in our culture- my mother used to paint and I started painting with her”. The entire colour scheme of this painting is indigenous and is prepared by natural sources. Though earlier the main theme of these painting were related to mythological stories of Hindu Gods and Goddesses but later the theme shifted to women related social issues and became an important medium for women painters to express their own problems. The present work is based on the qualitative method for women development and social reformation. The starting point for each human person

Conclusions

The kohbar is replete with paintings based on mythological, folk themes, and tantric symbolism. The paintings in this chamber are designed to bless the couple. The central theme of all paintings is love and fertility, though the approach may vary. It can commence with the story of Sita’s marriage or the Krishna-Radha episode with the ecstatic circle in which he leads the Gopis. The Mithilis are Sakti worshippers under the influence of tantric rituals and so Siva-Sakti, Kali, Durga, Ravana and Hanuman also appear in their murals. Symbols of fertility and prosperity like fish, parrot, elephant, turtle, sun, moon, bamboo tree, lotus, etc are prominent. The divine beings are positioned centrally in the frame while their consorts or mounts or simply their symbols and floral motifs form the background. The human figures are mostly abstract and linear in form; the animals are usually naturalistic and invariably depicted in profile. It begins with the flow of the brush without any preliminary sketching. As natural colors and twigs have given way to brushes and artificial paints, the subject of Mithila paintings has also changed enormously. The commercialization has caused serious harm to this art. The women and men are learning this art from the house painting now a day's markets in towns and cities. The trainers themselves do not know the essence and aesthetic beauty of this art and teach their students in utter ignorance. Some of them do not know the color combinations, how to obtain the colors from nature, preparing the background, the relationship between rhythm, color, songs, rituals, dance and painting. The themes and designs of the paintings are now, in most cases, decided by the buyers. The buyer-centric approach is a serious threat to the originality of color, design, motif, and sensitivity of this art form. Commercialization of this art has attracted several males also. For them, it is an industry that can easily provide a job opportunity. They are willing to paint anything for buyers in the name of Mithila painting. The relationships between painting and society, producing patterns of behavior whose limits are shaped by social values and ritual such

performative art and implicitly and explicitly develops. They have a spiritual and emotional attachment to it because it gives them a 'sense of place,' 'place attachment', 'place identity' and 'exists within a larger socio-political milieu'. Ritual usages are intimately intertwined with various rituals: social integration, conflict resolution, marriage, widowhood rituals and practices because of their perceived performance characteristics and symbolic value. so, cohber painting is a way out to the Mithila women towards outer world and women empowerment.

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