

Chapter I

Introduction: Mithila Folk Art Traditions and *Aripana*

Mithila is historically and culturally rich land in the map of Nepal. Mithila folk art tradition is not different from the history of folk art tradition. Mithila floor painting (*Aripana*), wall painting and symbols used in them make more clearly that what the condition of Mithila folk art was in olden days.

Mithila, an artistic land, is not only on the map of Nepal but also stretches towards north-east India. Mithila was a historical kingdom which was culturally rich and renowned. Nepal can boast on it. It falls on the territory of Terai which includes Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Sirha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi, and Rauthat.

Artistically and culturally, Mithila is one of the richest lands on the map of Nepal. Mithila has its own unique history which is very glorious, glamorous and at the same time golden. According to some scholars, Capital Janakpur has been the seat for learning from the time immemorial. It has been one of the most ancient traditional towns in Nepal. Janak, Maitri, Gargi, and Asthabakra are some of the legendary scholars of Mithila. Janak, the great philosopher king ruled over it for several years. The various kings of Janak dynasty ruled for more than fifty two generations. We find reference of Janakpur in the *Satapath Brahma*, the *Vrihad Vishnu Puran*, the *Vishnu Puran*, the *Vayu Puran*, the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharata*. In this regard Makhan Jha says, “Thus since the period of king, Mithi, the word Janak or Videh became the title of the royal family of Mithila which later formed the Janak dynasty” (168). Mithila has an ancient artistic legacy since the dawn of creation. It is the birthplace of Sita and the famed country of the pioneer medieval poet, Vidayapati. In this context Neel Rekha says, “Mithila, the birth place of Sita and the famed country of the great

medieval poet Vidyapati, is historically a somewhat fluid cultural region rather than a definite political or geographical unit" (66).

Thanks to snowmelt from the Himalayas and monsoon rains in July and August, Mithila is normally well watered with hundreds of rivers, ponds and tanks teeming with animal life and the ubiquitous lotus and wild expanses of flat fertile land. However, Mithila can be burning hot in the summer and bitterly cold in the winter. Indeed, until the implementation of land reform in the 1960s, the landlords of this region were among the wealthiest in the country.

For centuries, the women of Mithila region of the southern Nepal and of Northern Bihar have done wall and floor paintings on the occasion of marriages and other domestic rituals. These paintings, inside their homes, on the internal and external walls of their compounds, and on the ground inside or around their homes, create sacred, protective, and auspicious spaces for their families and their rituals. Although the images were similar, women of different castes developed distinctive styles of paintings. Another critic K.S. Srivastava has observed culture of marriage and remarks, "Mithila paintings are a part of family ceremonies and village festivals, they decorate the walls of marriage chambers, the wrappings of ritual gifts and the letter known as *Kohbar* with which unmarried Mithila girls traditionally marriage proposal to the men of their choices" (14).

Although, traditionally, women of several castes painted, Kulkarni was only able to convince a small group of Mahapatra Brahmin and Kayastha women to paint on paper. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, two of these Indian women, Sita Devi and Ganga Devi were recognized as great artists in Nepal and India where they received numerous commissions, and in Europe, Japan, Russia and the United States where they represented India in cultural fairs and expositions. Their success and active

encouragement led scores of other women to paint. Many of these women have also been recognized as artists of national and international stature. Furthermore, women of several other castes are now painting most especially the *Dusadh*, a Dalit community, and also a small numbers of men.

Over time, aside from growing diversity of people painting, the subject matter of the paintings has expanded to include ancient epics, local legends and tales, domestic, rural and community life and ritual. Local, national, and international politics, as well as the painter's own life histories are also portrayed. Artists of different castes and genders are now borrowing themes and styles from one another. Mithila painting has demonstrated extraordinary vitality and has become a vibrant and aesthetically powerful tradition.

Mithila painting is one of the living creative activities of the women of this region. It is a famous folk painting on paper, cloth, readymade garments, movable object and so on mainly by the village women of Mithila. Originally it was a folk art, practised by the women of all castes and communities, including the Muslims, on the wall and the floors using the natural and vegetable colors. Later some people took interest in it and motivated the women to translate their art from walls and floors to the canvas too and now the new form has given this a very distinct identity in the art world as well as in the market. This folk art has a history, a cultural background, women's monopoly and distinct regional identification. Critic Ram Dayal Rakesh says, "Today this art has been exposed to the whole world. The women painters are not applying their indigenous knowledge only in four walls of their houses but they are exposed to the outside world. Most of the women artists of Mithila are more or less self dependent. They have overcome the men in art skill" (110).

Mithila painting basically focuses on favorite subjects like; various gods and goddesses. In short, it is mainly religious in nature. Though the initial inspiration for Mithila folk arts like other arts was religious, later their horizon of subject matter was broadened. In contemporary Mithila paintings, we can find familiar subject matters like daily village life, myths, and culture. In short, Mithila arts have become the witness of ancient and contemporary ways of Maithil life, culture and their living ethos and their themes are larger than life. Scholar Arun Kumar Bajpai as cited by Ram Dyal Rakesh in his book *Janakpur the Sacred Jewel of Nepal* remarks, " Mithila paintings have their characteristics themes which collectively express the Maithili attitude towards life, the feelings, the experiences, and thoughts that govern the Maithili way of living" (qtd. in Rakesh 104).

Mithila art has its own significance. There are varieties of Mithila folk arts; they can be studied on the following categories:

1. Wall painting i.e. *Kohabar* Painting
2. Floor painting i.e. *Aripan* Painting
3. Body painting i.e. *Godana* (Tattooing) and *Mehdin* (heena)
4. Pot painting i.e. pottery picture
5. Cloth painting

Ram Dyal Rakesh has divided Mithila folk arts into following categories:

1. Cloth making
2. Utensils making
3. Painting
4. Clay modeling, potteries and terracotta
5. Handicrafts
6. Woodwork

7. Making garlands
8. Making lac bangles
9. Matting
10. Making ornaments
11. Making bamboo articles
12. Doll making
13. Color making
14. Tattooing (*The Sacred Jewel of Nepal*, 90)

For better understanding of Mithila folk arts (painting) here are given detail of some types of Mithila paintings.

Cloth making: Cloth making is one of the oldest occupations of Maithil people. Especially Brahmin and Kayastha women prepare sacred threads for sacred thread ceremony with the help of charkha.

Doll making: Doll making is another folk art of Maithil women. It is also called Kenya- Putra and has special charm for children. In ancient times, these dolls made by maiden girls are sent with them when they are married. But nowadays, this custom is in decreasing mode.

Wood work: Wood work is also one of the folk arts of Mithila. It is done by carpenters of Mithila region. The wood works are made on different occasions of religious ceremonies. They are considered sacred *Kharam* (wood slipper), *Okher* (wood work used to grind rice), and *Sindurdani* (vermilion box) etc. are made on the occasion of *Bratbandha (Janau)* and wedding (*Bibah*) respectively.

Sikki handicrafts: *Sikki* handicrafts are also prepared by the rural women of Mithila. They prepare articles of golden colors out of *Sikki* grass. It is used in making

many varieties of articles out of it. Like *sikki* penstand, *sikki mauni*, *sikkimujela*, *sikki* ash tray, *sikki* paint etc.

Bamboo articles: Bamboo articles means articles (which are) made out of bamboo. This art is of great use in making house basket; bookshelves, ladder *machan* etc. It is considered as a sacred tree. It is a symbol of prosperity.

Wall painting: Wall painting is another mithila folk art. It is also called *Bhittichitra* in Maithili. Wall paintings are done on house walls on the auspicious occasion of *Mundan*, *Bratbandh* and marriage ceremony. They are also depicted to welcome and honor guests. Favorite subjects of wall paintings are various gods and goddesses, peacock, fish, elephant and palanquin with porters. They are drawn on the walls of *Gosain Ghar* (corridor) where the tutelary God is worshipped.

Tattooing (*Godana*): This folk art is done for decorating the human body especially the skin. The people of Mithila have fascination for this skin fashion. Women folks are fond of this. This is called *Godana* in the local language. They engrave in their arms, legs, chests, hands, necks and on the back in black designs. This is engraved with the help of needles and it is very painful. Originally, '*Godana*' paintings only depicted legends of *Raja Salhesh*, an important divinity in the local *Dusadh* community; but later stories and incidents from Hindu epics and mythology were also integrated. It is done by a particular caste called *Natin*.

***Mehdin* (Heena):** Like tattooing, it is also body painting but it is generally painted on the hand and feet. It has also ritualistic value because it is applied during marriage ceremony or any religious festival. It is applied generally to the female folk. The reddish brown color of '*Mehdin*', which stands for the prosperity that a bride is expected to bring to her new family. It is considered most auspicious for all wedding-related ceremonies.

A day before her wedding, the girl and her female relatives gather for the 'Mehdin' ritual during which the future bride embellishes her hands, wrists, palms and feet with a lovely red hue. The groom's hands are also decorated with 'Mehdin' patterns. It is said that the darker the design of a bride's *Mehdin* the more her mother-in-law loves her. A deeply colored design is a sign of good luck for the marital couple. A bride is not expected to perform any house work until her wedding *Mehdin* has faded. And it is jokingly reputed that some lazy brides may secretly redo their heena designs to prolong their leisure.

Nowadays people also use heena to their hair for changing color and for shining the hair. While much of the symbolism of heena designs has been lost over time, some examples still remain: the peacock, lotus flower and an elephant with a raised trunk, which all stand for good luck.

Pot Painting: People of Mithila make many types of utensils which are used in day to day life. They are generally made of soil and iron. They make beautiful designs on them. They also engrave images of birds, gods and goddesses out of religious feelings. People make potteries and paint them in various colors. The village potteries of Mithila make the clay toys for children and pots of daily use. These are very useful for the entertainment of the children and domestic purpose. They are also good for household goods and religious purpose. 'Purhara' and 'Patila' are the most pious pots made for puja purposes. They are painted tastefully in different colors by women folk of Mithila.

Kohbar painting: *Kohbar* painting is considered as unique highly traditional art form. *Kohbar* is a typical Maithili word which is popularly used in Janakpur, Mahottari, and Eastern Uttar Pradesh and almost throughout Bihar. *Kohbar* means *Suhagraat* (honeymoon). Newly married couples enjoy it in a magnificently decorated

room during the first night of their conjugal life. This kind of art is very erotic in nature.

Religious painting: This is the main painting of Mithila folk arts and Mithila women are expert in drawing such types of painting. It is religious in nature because it depicts many mythological lores and legends. Krishna, Rama and various gods and goddesses are depicted on the canvas and papers. Sometimes, it draws Kali and Shakti, two female goddesses along with Lord Shiva. Mithila art, therefore, is deeply and highly influenced by the Hindu religion. The *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagawata Gita* are the perennial sources of inspiration for the women artists of Mithila. Women are mainly very religions minded. Lydia Aryan has thrown light on religious aspect of Mithila painting. She remarks, “For several years now the women of Mithila have cultivated the ceremonial art of drawing and painting on the mud walls of their house, the floors of their courtyards and later, on paper as a form of worship and instrument for ritual and means of communication with gods and men.” (183)

Aripana: Etymologically the word ‘*Aripana*’ is derived from Sanskrit word ‘*Alepan*’ which means ‘to smear’. The original purpose behind the formation of *Aripana* is to smear and decorate the ground. The floor paintings, or *Aripanas*, are extremely numerous and vary according to the rituals to be performed. *Aripanas* are drawn directly on the ground using one or two fingers of the right hand dipped into moistened white rice paste (*pithar*), and completed with one or more dots of red vermilion (*sindur*). These figures are combinations and elaborations of symmetrical, floral, and geometrical designs measuring as much as six or eight feet across. *Aripanas* are made for particular ritual, they usually fade and disappear within a few days, or at

most in a week, or two. Aripana is like *Rangoli* in Maharashtra, *Chouk puran* in Bhojpuri culture, *Sathia* in Gujrati culture, *Kolam* in Kerla culture and *Alpna* in Bengali culture. It is magical and mysterious circle which is drawn on the floor to purify and sanctify the particular land for worshipping purpose. It is ritualistic art which is depicted on various occasions. Mithila art is mainly ceremonial art. So, it is done on the auspicious occasions like *Batsabitri*, *Naagpanchami*, and *Satyanarayan Bhagwan puja*. It is also painted on the occasion of sacred thread ceremony and marriage ceremony. So, it is rightly called ceremonial art. It has been compared to the Tibetan *mandala* art and it is deeply influenced by Tantric cult. It is the outcome of the meditation and Yogic experience of the Mithila women artists. In this regard, Lydia Aryan says:

The *Aripanas* are drawn on ritually prescribed occasions, on the clean swept ground of the courtyards or inside the house. Ideally the design of an *Aripana* should be revealed to the lady artist as a result of meditation and general Yogic experience. In practice the details of the various *Aripanas* are learned by girls from watching the works of their mothers, grandmothers and other female relatives and neighbors. (97)

According to Ram Dayal Rakesh, the *Aripanas* differ according to occasions. He enlists them as *Tusari puja Aripanas*, *Sandhya Aripanas*, *Kalyanidevi* (welfare goddess) *Aripanas*, *Sasthi Aripanas*, *Kojarat Aripanas*, *Dipawali Aripanas*, *Swastik Aripanas*, and so on (“*Aakruti*” 44). Whatever the occasions may be, all kinds of *Aripanas* reflect the collective symbols and icons of culture and ceremonies.

But nowadays, for commercial purpose, Mithila Arts have been produced in a large scale. Women are proliferating this occasional business as industries. From the mud walls and clean swept floors, these artistic motifs have been transfixed into

Nepali papers and brought into market place, to make it known to the world.

However, its ceremonial and cult values lie only on its ritualistic performance not on professional reproduction of arts.

In the past, the whole Mithila region was a fertile land for the development of mystic cult called tantrism. Mithila played a vital role in the development of Mithila school of Hindu law and orthodox tantric cult in Buddhism. Fusion of tantrism can be found in excess mostly in *Aripana* paintings. For its tantric features, Lydia Aryan relates it with Tibetan *Mandala* “a magic circle representing a magically purified space for rituals and domestic religious ceremonies, the equivalent of Tibetan *Mandala*” (185). So, making of *Aripana* is a sacred task of devotion and meditation and austere religious practice of Maithil women. Each line and form carries meanings; each performance is a moment of spiritual vow. An artist has to work as if she is coaxing the cosmic energy and interacting with divine power.

Nature and animals are other favorite subject matters in Mithila arts. Nature or Earth is associated with feminine power in many ancient and modern traditions. For Maithil women, nature is perennial source of inspiration. They depict nature and animals in their arts because nature for them is a surrogate of *Shakti* and animals as other forms of divine power. They treat nature in pantheistic way. Talking about nature and animal symbols in Mithila art is talking about divinity, feminine power, procreative aspect, magnanimity and abundance of nature and animals show their desires for existential harmony.

The production of Mithila art is running through ages. Such a long chain of legacy is a process of mystification of the lives, belief and cultural paraphernalia of Maithil women. In other words, it is a process of making a purposive mythology through cultural legacy and myth of inheritance. Purposive mythology means to

render the artisans as an indispensable part in the chain of legacy. For instance, the mothers instruct their daughters, and many times, spontaneously, the inquisitive daughters learn it themselves watching and observing the ceremonial production of the arts. The mind of the girls is preoccupied with an obligation towards the tradition that they should teach the performances of art whatever their mothers, grandmothers, aunts have been doing for years.

In Mithila art, the role of women artists and artisans is very prominent. Mithila art reflects the human values, tradition, culture and religion. The art symbolically represents the relation between human life and the world. Some of the arts reflect the stories of mythology, folk dances, folk songs and folklores. Along with the development of civilization, Mithila art is ageless. The main purpose of Mithila art is to balance between materiality and spirituality which can be abundantly found in marriage paintings.

The folk artisans find a joy in observing, penetrating and reflecting nature in their arts and crafts. They look at nature, observe the flora and fauna, study the life of animals, birds, human beings, they design different and diverse objects on it with abstract nature symbols in geometric forms. In a few words, their arts can be called a mystical transformation of nature into arts, bodies into spirits.

A brief discussion of private and public symbols would be meaningful because like other folk arts Mithila art is marked for the use of unintentional public symbols rather than idiosyncratic private symbols. Often a private symbol is a complex and indirect symbol. Modern arts are deciphered analyzing the private symbols. Many times, public symbols can be exploited to breed a private meaning in art. For example, it is said that the expressive distortion of Cubism is influenced by the geometric patterns and archetypal symbol of African tribal art. On the other hand, an

unintentional public symbol can be understood in folk artists' community. Ione Bell agrees with this idea of private and public symbol:

Symbol may be generally understood either public or they may be individual elite and private. According to the psychologist Carl Jung, the effective living symbol that evokes a universal response must contain an understanding shared by large number of people. (213)

In brief, whether that is ceremonial performance or commercial production, Mithila art should not be viewed merely as an aesthetic manifestation of a traditional and indigenous life pattern. There are many things to be analyzed. The major objective of this dissertation is to discuss the themes, subject matters, forms and structures, contemporary trends and symbolic variations in Mithila arts (esp. *Aripanas*) which are drawn on different occasions. The art for them is a means to express and communicate themselves with gods, nature, human beings and social realm in which they live.

Though the Mithila folk arts speaks out its folk tradition and ritual performance of not only Maithil people but it also appeals the universal (cosmic) harmony between creeds, religions, cultures and materiality and spirituality. The Government of Nepal has not paid proper attention to enhance the folk arts of Mithila. This art has been enduring the prejudice of Nepal Government since time immemorial

Chapter II

Symbols in Art Works

Symbols in art are human's oldest forms of visual communication. Artists have incorporated symbols into their work since humans first began to delve into the world of visual expression and they painted on cave walls. During later times, those who were unable to read could still follow along in, say, religious events by looking at and understanding the paintings in their Churches, houses, floors and walls. Puzzles, riddles and symbols are still part of the vast appeal of art.

Symbols are pictures, images, or objects used to represent ideas, concepts, beliefs, attitudes, or feelings. Symbols can have deep meaning and can evoke powerful emotion, such as the crucifix in Christianity or the Star of David in Judaism.

For a symbol to have significance, its meaning must be known to the viewers. Take, for example, the Chinese symbol for *yin* and *yang*. To those who understand its origins as an explanation of the workings of the universe, it is a symbol for the idea that one thing cannot exist without the other. To those who do not know the symbol's meaning, it is an intriguing design with opposing colors and interlocking shapes. It does not mean viewers cannot enjoy it; it simply means they don't know its deeper or hidden significance. Similarly, a sound such as 'meow' to represent a cat has a meaning known to many, but it could be replaced with a word like 'jalley' if everyone memorized the new sound and agreed on its meaning.

The word 'symbol' has had a long and interesting Western thought. More than 2,000 years ago the Greeks used the word symbols to refer to the rejoining of a thing that had been divided or broken in two. For example, two friends might break a token in half, each of them keeping one of the halves. The fact that the two parts- and only they- could be rejoined to form the whole was proof of the common bond of

friendship between the two individuals. Already in this early usage of symbol there was a meaning that still often recurs: some tangible item (the divided token) was being used to stand for an abstract idea (friendship). Symbol was redefined and broadened in meaning by the early Christian writers, and since the other nuances have continued to accrue to the term, so today it has a whole range of meanings. Some breadth of this range is illustrated by the fact that while some items may be disparagingly referred to as 'mere' symbols, to call other things 'symbolic' is to elevate item in importance far above their mundane meaning.

We could find different views or opinions about symbolism. For Alex Priminger, "symbol is a manner of representation in which something immaterial is virtually associated with something material."(118) In another words, we can say a literary symbols unite an image (the analogy) and an idea or conception (the subject). He further says, "Symbolism is a blending of sensibility and imagination."(118) In this regard, Thomas Carlyle says:

In the symbol proper, there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the infinite; the infinite is made to blend itself with the finite, to stand visible, and as it were, attainable there. By symbols, accordingly, is man guided and commanded, made happy, made wretched. He everywhere finds himself encompassed with symbols, recognized as such or not recognized: the universe is but one vast symbol of God; is not all that he does symbolically; a revelation to sense of the mystic God- given force that is in him; a ' gospel of freedom', which he, the '*messiah of nature*', preaches, as he can, by act and word? Not a hut he builds but is the visible embodiment of a thought; but bears visible record of invisible things;

but is, in the transcendental sense, symbolical as well as real. (547)

According to Hornstein, Percy and Brown, a conscious and deliberate technique of the use of symbols, brought to the status of a literary school by a group of poets including Mallarmé, Verlaine and Rimbaud. The underlying philosophy of the symbolists was a conviction that the transient objective world is not true reality, but a reflection of the invisible Absolute. Moreover, correspondences exist between impulses derived through different senses. The symbolists, therefore, rebelled against the techniques of realism and naturalism, which were designed to capture the transient. They believed that the inner eternal reality could only be suggested: Mallarmé Says, 'to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create' (qtd.in, Sengupta and Mundra 119).

The symbolists avoid scrupulously political, sociological, and ethical themes. They have cared for sensations of beauty and jettisoned social and moral responsibility. Any theme, they maintain, is acceptable as long as it captures the poet's subtle intuitions and contributes to a total design. They are neither moral nor immoral, but amoral, and upholders of the doctrine of art for art's sake some of the poets in their zeal for avoiding middle class morality, resorted to drugs, Sadism, and alcohol, and lived a life of perversion and despair. Some chose to call themselves Decadents.

M.H. Abrams talks about two types of symbols, eg. conventional or public, and private or personal symbols. A peacock, for example, is the conventional symbol of pride, a lamb of meekness, and an eagle of heroic struggle. 'Rose' as a conventional symbol means love. But W.B. Yeats used 'rose' in different senses. In *The Rose of Peace* the stands for earthly love; in *The Rose of the World* the ' rose' stands as much for transitory love and beauty as divine and eternal love and beauty which never

cloy, in *To the Rose upon the Road of Time*, the 'rose' is much the Rosicrucian rose as also a symbol of creative imagination and occult philosophy. Ione Bell is also agreed with this idea of M. H. Abrahms.

Symbol may be generally understood and public or they may be individual elite and private. According to the Psychologist Carl Jung, the effective living symbol that evokes a universal response must contain an understanding shared by large number of people. (213)

According to R.G. Hagger, a symbol is a recognisable equivalent or type of some person, objects, or abstract idea by means of features associated in the popular mind without their martyrdom; for example, the wheel of St. Catherine. It is also the expression of abstract ideas in terms of pattern, colour, line; the conveyance of abstract or spiritual ideas by means of natural objects.

Symbols may be of many kinds: hieroglyphics, initials, emblems, allegories, fables and enigmas. Some symbols closely approximate to an idea or person and are easily recognized; others can be understood only by following some out-of-the-way association of ideas. In this context, Terry Eagleton says:

The symbol fused together motion and stillness, Turbulent content and organic form, mind and world. Its material body is the medium of an absolute spiritual truth, one perceived by direct intuition rather than by any laborious process of critical analysis. In this sense, the symbol brought such truths to bear on the mind in a way which brooked no questions: either you saw it or you didn't. (19)

It is often said that Baudlaire is the father of symbolism. But strictly speaking, Dante in his *Divine Comedy* was the mentionable symbolist., Shipley says, there are many symbolic creatures in the poem, and there are four patterns of interpretation on each

of the four levels of symbolism. The four levels are: literal, allegorical, tropological and analogical. Baudlaire used two types of symbolism- human and transcendental. He in his attempt to go beyond reality, used reality as his starting point. It is a movement from the plane of material objects and the sensations they inspire to the plane of abstract concepts. Baudlaire could also move on the same plane from one physical sensation to another. Both the process may be regarded as 'correspondences'. While the formal is described as 'correspondences verticales', the latter as 'correspondences horizontales'.

The common denominator of many of the current usages of symbol derives from the work of the influential nineteenth century writers. So we can say symbolism was a late nineteenth-century art movement of French and Belgian origin in poetry and other arts. In literature, the movement had its roots in *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*, 1857) by Charles Baudelaire. The works of Edgar Allan Poe, which Baudelaire greatly admired and translated into French, were a significant influence and the source of many stock tropes and images. The aesthetic was developed by Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine during the 1860s and '70s. In the 1880s, the aesthetic was articulated through a series of manifestoes and attracted a generation of writers. The label 'symbolist' itself comes from the critic Jean Moréas who coined it in order to distinguish the symbolists from the related decadent movement in literature and art.

In nineteenth century, the propounder of British Romanticism, William Blake and T.S. Eliot have made substantial contribution to symbolism. Blake was first Romantic writer to emphasize the need of symbolism in the sphere of art poetry. He called the symbols "vision", for he had the rare mystical vision. The Romantic poets by and large found the existing language, rich in many respects, as it was, hardly adequate to represent the abstract and spiritual notion of ideal world. They had,

therefore, recourse of symbols. Blake had his private and personal symbols and myth. When he used the term 'lamb' as a symbol of simplicity and meekness he was distinctly conventional. But as he used the term 'thunder', he did not mean the wrath of God, but the wrath of Urizen, who was essentially a tyrannical force. Stretched further, it referred to king George III.

It is interesting to note that Blake resorted to the doctrine of contraries in his use of symbols, which he enunciated and explained in his marriage of Heaven and Hell: "without contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary to human existence." *His Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* are an illustration of what the poet himself said, "two contrary states of the human soul" (126). Blake, through a mystic, has evolved a system of his own in the use of symbols. He confined himself to three principal themes- art, brotherhood, and individuality. Even while in the state of lofty imagination, he could not forget the suffering humanity in bondage. He made a significant departure from the traditional symbols.

Distinct from, but related to, the movement in literature, symbolism in art represents an outgrowth of the darker, gothic side of Romanticism; but where Romanticism was impetuous and rebellious, symbolist art was static and hieratic.

Northrop Frye has talked about three phases of symbolism: the formal phase, where the symbol is seen as an "image"; the mythical phase, where it is seen as an "archetype"; and the anagogic phase, where it is seen as a "monad." Within his discussion of the formal phase, Frye imagines allegory as existing on a sort of scale that ranges from naïve allegory and extreme outwardness, where it is a simple device in discursive language, to the extreme inwardness of private association. Unlike the Romantics who opposed symbolism and allegory, Frye considers allegory an aspect of symbolism. In the mythical phase, the idea of the symbol as something that repeats itself throughout the body of literature is emphasized. In this phase, poems are

regarded as imitations of other poems more than of nature. In the anagogic phase, the idea of literature as a total imaginative form dominates. In this phase, literature is seen no longer as looking outward to comment on life but as containing life and reality in a system of verbal relationship.

Another critical theorist Murray Krieger has quite different views on symbol and allegory. He says:

It is difficult to find a formula for the unmediated in the language of meditation did not inhibit the continuing efforts of these theorists and their followers. One way or another, since the original attempt to achieve a special definition of symbol within a symbol-allegory dichotomy, this need to describe a manipulation of language that explodes its usual limits has extended this dichotomy to a number of others. The New Critics, concerned with a poetics demanding figurative unity, translate the opposition between symbol and allegory into a more observable opposition between functional metaphor and ornamental analogy. (1248)

Symbolism in literature is distinct from symbolism in art although the two overlapped on a number of points. In painting, symbolism was a continuation of some mystical tendencies in the Romantic Tradition which included such artists as Caspar David Friedrich Fernand Khnopff and John Henry Fuseli and it was even more closely aligned with the self-consciously dark and private decadent movement.

There were several rather dissimilar groups of symbolist painters and visual artists, which included Gustave Moreau, Gustav Klimt, Mikalojus, Konstantinas Ciurlionis, Odilon Redon, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Henri Fantin-Latour, Edvard Munch, Félicien Rops, and Jan Toorop. Symbolism in painting had an even larger geographical reach than symbolism in poetry, reaching Mikhail Vrubel, Nicholas

Roerich, Victor Borisov-Musatov, Martiros Saryan, Mikhail Nesterov, Leon Bakst in Russia, as well as Frida Kahlo in Mexico, Elihu Vedder, Remedios Varo, Morris Graves and David Chetlahe Paladin in the United States. Auguste Rodin is sometimes considered a symbolist in sculpture.

The symbolist painters mined mythology and dream imagery for a visual language of the soul, seeking evocative paintings that brought to mind a static world of silence. The symbols used are not the familiar emblems of mainstream iconography but intensely personal, private, obscure and ambiguous references. More a philosophy than an actual style of art, symbolism in painting influenced the contemporary Art Nouveau movement and Les Nabis. In their exploration of dreamlike subjects, symbolist painters are found across centuries and cultures, as they are still today.

Symbolism is broad subject that has relevance for our understanding of many human endeavors, ranging from social structure and politics through religion and ritual to language and art. It is a difficult topic to grapple with because, though the symbols themselves may be tangible, the meanings they carry are intangible and often elusive. The distinctions that Peirce made between index, icon and symbol are still useful tools for discussion, helping us avoid confusion as we discuss the various ways in which figures are attributed meanings. Peirce says:

An index is a sign that emerges from some natural phenomenon rather than being an arbitrary convention of culture but Icons and symbols, however, derived from human convention; they are products of culture rather than of nature. Icons bear some resemblance to the thing for which they are a sign; symbols, by contrast, bear no resemblance to their referents. (qtd. in Richard L. Anderson 54)

Not all art in primitive societies is intended to convey specific meanings. The geometric pattern that colorfully decorates the sides of a pot or basket may be just that- decoration, conveying no more meaning than patterns on most American men's neckties. Careful fieldwork, however, sometimes reveals that patterns which we outsiders cannot decipher are indeed iconic representations of specific things, beings, actions, or ideas. The complex figures that characterize Northwest Coast art are a case in point: No matter how seemingly fragmented and distorted the design, the maker intended it to portray certain individuals or animals, and he had at his command a repertoire of techniques for carrying out his culture's style of iconographic art.

The art of the central Australian *Walberi* has some parallels to that of the Northwest Coast in that specific objects, individuals, and their activities are represented iconographically. But whereas the only additional meanings associated with Northwest Coast design is their function as "status symbols" for their owners *Walberi* symbolism has a deeper significance. *Walberi* symbolically reflects life and belief, both on the level of larger spatial, socio-cultural, and cosmological issues.

The subject of universal symbols is fascinating; part of its attraction perhaps lies in its implied promise to provide a basis for shared understanding between all people regardless of their cultural diversity. Unfortunately, little substantial headway has been made towards rigorously establishing the existence of such symbols. The biggest stumbling block has been the vagueness with which the supposedly symbolic figures and their meanings have been defined.

There have, however, been a few well documented studies of widespread graphic motifs. The heraldic woman, for example, has turned up on four continents and throughout the Pacific, always seemingly associated with one of two sets of related meanings. Careful studies such as Fraser's pursuit of this motif will lead to a

better understanding of the process of cultural diffusion and of the appeal of such figures.

Symbolism is an iceberg whose tip is obvious, whose massive importance can be guessed at but whose submerged features are currently either inaccessible or else accessible only at the cost of a great outlay of effort and ingenuity.

Chapter III

Aripanas as Symbolic Art Forms

Aripanas are symbolic art works. Furthermore, the constituent images used in *Aripanas* are symbolic. The viewing and interpretations of a number of *Aripanas* reveal that the same symbols present in different *Aripanas* do not signify same thing but their significances vary according to context or ritual performance.

As we all know, painting is the visual text and we can read it by the help of colors, pictures and the lines drawn to show some motives. If we try to analyze the painting without knowing about its context (time and place), especially the culture from which it originates then we may not reach at the core of the paintings.

Every folk art has its own context, symbols and images. Folk arts are very close to their own cultural aspects of life of the people from which it emerges so before leafing through any folk art we should know the right ritual performances and ceremonies; cultural, social, economical, and religious elements of that culture. Folk art by nature is very near to the life pattern of the people whether that is, folk arts, folk songs, folk dances and folklores.

Mithila folk arts especially *Aripanas* have their own symbolical significance and cultural motives to analyze it. Mithila has a very rich tradition of folk art and ritual performance. Every ceremony of Mithila folk art has a strong inter-relationship with its religion, culture and society. Almost all the Maithil people know well why they use a particular symbol and image in a particular context. For instance, the elephant, horse, palanquin are the symbols of royalty and richness. The Sun and the Moon represent for a long life. The goose and peacock are symbols of welfare and calmness. Betel leaves (*paan*) and lotuses symbolize good luck. Bamboo is the symbol of future progeny.

To show symbolic variations the present researcher has selected eight *Aripanas* (paintings). All most all selected paintings are related with famous occasions and ceremonies of Mithila. They are as follows.



Fig.1. *Kamal Dahan*

Kamal Dahan (fig.1) depicts the symbols like lotus flower, lotus leaves and lotus buds and parrots. Lotus is common symbol in Mithila paintings especially in *Aripana* and *Kohbar* paintings. Without it *Aripana* and *Kohbar* paintings become incomplete. Lotus leaves are called *purain* in Mithila. It is the original symbol of female folks. *Purain* is must necessary in almost every *Aripana* painting. In this regard Ram Dayal Rakesh says:

Kamaldaha (lotus pond) is the symbolic representation of female

sexual organs, this motif is meant to enhance the sexual stamina of newly married couple. Maithil women artists are very innovative and imaginative and paint this motif according to their own original ideas and imagination. (105)

Lotus is common motif in the Mithila art. It signifies the universal life force and the opening of the consciousness of the divine. It is the *Hriday Kamalam*, the centralized lotus motif or the *Sahasradala Padmam*. The thousand petalled lotuses which is depicted in *Aripanas*. Lotus is associated with Lakshmi, Vishnu and Brahma but it is mainly associated with Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. So, the Maithil women draw her feet point towards the entrance of the goddess of plenty and prosperity. People worship Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, who has been gracing their homes every year and persuaded her to enter once again to provide boons and blessings. In this regard Dr. Rakesh says, “The lotus is a powerful and pervasive image in both Hindu and Buddhists tradition, emblematic among other things of auspicious female creativity of the possibility for purity emerging from a defiled environment, and or royalty” (131).

Parrots around lotus (*kamal*) show the real importance of parrots. Parrot means *suga or tota*, a beautiful bird. It is said that parrot dwells on the crown of *Kamdeva* who is a lord of love and beauty, so parrot is the symbol of love. Some scholars have opinion that parrot is the representation of friend and teacher but actually it is the symbol of soul. Therefore, it is also known as *Aatmaram*. In the *kohbar* painting we find parrot at the top level. It also suggests that in Mithila, soul is superior to the body. For Dr. Rakesh, “Image of parrots, cuckoos, bamboos and trees in *Aripana* is nothing

but just the medium of artistic expression” (131).



Fig.2. Abha Das. *Aripana Drawn in Madhushrawani*

There are many symbols used in *Madhushrawani* (fig.2). This figure depicts fish (in group in each corner), snakes (four snakes with fish), turtles, conch-shell (around the boundary line) and in the central part of this painting, there is a mat. This painting is related with *Madhushrawani* that is especially celebrated enthusiastically in the first year of their marriage.

Mat (*patia*) in the painting woven from *Mothi*, a fast multiplying reed that grows wild in the ponds and ditches of Mithila. This is brought by the bride as part of the marriage ritual. It is healthy and hygienic, cozy and comfortable to sleep on. This *Patia* seems like bloomed lotus flower. Lotus flower, here, symbolically represents goddess Laxmi to whom Maithil women regard as their sister. So, this flower shows the presence of their (Maithil women's) sister. Conch- shell around the border commonly symbolizes the determination, power, wealth and initiation. Conch- shell is regarded as goddess Laxmi's brother and brother-in-law of god Vishnu. It is said that where there is conch there exists the goddess of wealth, Laxmi. There is belief in

Mithila region that the sound of conch evades the evil spirits and scientifically also it has been proved that the sound of *Sankha* kills bacteria and viruses which are very harmful for us.

Fishes, on the four different corners, have also symbolic value. They are the symbolic representation of love, auspiciousness, fertility and good luck. In *Madhushrawani Aripana* fish symbolizes love, fertility and *suhag* (bridegroom) so only those women eat fish whose husbands are alive. The fish is also symbol of the first incarnation of god Vishnu, i.e. *Matsya Avatar*. The fish is regarded auspicious when Maithil people go out of their houses. The great poet Tulsi Das compares fish with pure mind and innocence.

Like fish, tortoise also has its specific symbolic meaning. Tortoise in the above figure represents long life. Maithil people wish that the bride and groom should have long life and they should enjoy their marriage life. On the other hand, the tortoise also represents one of the forms of Vishnu, i.e. *Kurma Avatar* so it has also religious significance.

In Mithila snakes are widespread and important figures in Mithila rituals, cosmology and narrative paintings. They always accompany image of Shiva. They are said to be the basic supports of the universe though Baua Devi and Godawari Dutta have very different images of these primordial beings. Unlike the biblical vision of the snake as inherently evil, the Mithila tradition recognizes that *Naga* can be frightening and deadly but if well treated, it can also be benevolent and protective.

As a consequence, *Naga* is central to protective marriage rituals, as well as to numerous folktales and legends. The image of Vishnu recumbent on *Shesh Naga*, the massive snake representing endless time, is another popular subject in Mithila painting.

To wrap of this figure, we can find the symbols like fish and turtle which depict the presence of Vishnu in different forms. And lotus flower in the painting shows the presence of goddess Laxmi. In other words, we can say lord Vishnu is presented with his family. Conch- shell also represents other member of the same family who is standby to evade evil spirits out of that place and is praying for bridegroom's long life. Abha Das's painting deserves the characteristics of *Kachani* Painting.



Fig.3. Marriage Aripana Showing Bamboo Grove Penetrating the Lotus Leaves

This figure is related to marriage ceremony. It is quite different from the previous two in symbolic meaning and structure. This bamboo grove penetrating the lotus leaves has its own specific meaning. This figure is associated with marriage

ceremony; therefore, the symbols used in this painting are related with the same. It depicts symbols like lotus leaves, lotus flowers, turtles, fish, *Latpatia suga*, peacock, Sun and Moon and many more.

Here, lotus in Mithila especially in marriage paintings symbolizes female beauty and fertility. It also signifies sexual organs. This motif is meant to enhance the sexual stamina of the newly married couple. The main purpose of this motif is to create a suitable atmosphere for celebrating the honeymoon night successfully. There seems to be great confusion among scholars about the interpretation of this motif. Most scholars have described it as the lotus motif or 'lotus ring' motif, pierced by a bamboo shaft representing sexual union of the male and female or the bride and the bridegroom. In reality, this symbol neither represents the lotus flower nor 'lotus ring', nor sexual union of any kind. It primarily represents the lotus plant, with its *jar-muri* or roots and stem from which leaves normally 15 among the Maithil (*Kayastha*) grow in various directions. The floral medallions, that surround the central stem, like a ring, are not lotus flower but leaves or *pata*. On account of their floral form many scholars have mistaken the lotus leaves for flowers. Similarly, the central vertical stem cutting across the ring of lotus leaves is not meant to be a bamboo shaft but the 'stem and roots' of the lotus plant. The word *Purain*, which denotes lotus leaves, is often used as a synonymous for the marriage motif and it is the leaves rather than the flowers that signify rapid proliferation. The word *Kamal* rather than *Purain* is commonly used for the lotus flower in Mithila. For example, in the case of the lotus pond motif, the word used is *Kamal Daha*. The word *Bari* is used for the fruit. These three elements of lotus plants are clearly distinguished by the Maithils in their belief and iconography.

The entire marriage *Aripana*, with its roots, stem and proliferating leaves, is the symbol of the bride or female but is not, as some scholars have it, her *yonis* or

sexual organ. Many women painters paint a female face at the upper end of the central stem, clearly indicating that the lotus plant motif is the personification of the bride. Further proof of this belief is the ritual of offering *sindur* (vermillion) to the painted motif of the *kohabar* by the bridegroom, which is obviously the symbolic repetition of the act of offering vermillion in the central parting of the hair of the bride as part of the ceremony of solemnization of marriage.

As mentioned above in the depiction of the lotus plant motif, the women of Mithila often endeavored to personify the motif as the bride. It has also been observed earlier that the importance of the lotus plant and lotus pond in Mithila stems from its abundance growth. In this context, it may be pointed out here that the Hindu goddess of good fortune, prosperity and fertility is known as *Kamala*, 'the one who dwells in the lotus.' Interestingly, one of her appellations is Laxmi literally meaning 'She -of- the Hundred- Thousands', which has a direct bearing on the abundant proliferation of fertility.

In the pictorial depiction of the marriage paintings especially in *kohabar* motif, the most essential iconographic features include the central vertical stem with a broad base and a pointed pinnacle, the latter being either in the form of a female face (the bride) or a lotus bud. The stem itself is shown studded with lotus flower ornamentation or other decorative patterning. Cutting across the center of the stem is the central lotus leaf medallion, which is usually surrounded by six similar medallions forming a ring. Eight other medallions are painted in the interstices between the central and the surrounding ones. The remaining spaces within and around the ring are filled with a networks of stalks issuing out of the base and symmetrically spreading in all directions, interconnecting medallions, the innumerable lotus flowers, buds, calyxes, and weeds, like umbilical cords. The rim of the entire plant, which itself

resembles one large medallion, is usually shown dotted with a row of parrots or bees. Occasionally a pair or two of fish or snakes are drawn in the space within or around the plant.

It should be noted here that there is an astonishing similarity of concept and form between the so-called lotus medallions and the *Purna-Kalash* panels of the celebrated Buddhist stupas of Sanchi and the *kohbar* motif of Mithila. Both represent lotus plant motifs signifying fertility and auspiciousness; occasionally in Sanchi the lotus plant is shown personified as Shri-Laxmi, the goddess of beauty and plenty, surrounded by lotus leaves, flowers, buds and fruit but in Mithila the same plant (*kohbar*) is personified as the bride desirous of the quality personified by the goddess Shri. In this particular case the central stem of the lotus plant has been converted into the anthropomorphic figure of the goddess Shri in her standing posture. This depiction comes closest to the *kohbar* motif in which the central stem has been converted into the figure of the bride by painting a female face at the top. Extremely ornate and stylized lotus flowers, calyxes, buds, leaves and fruit rising out of the spot (Sanchi) or roots, (jar in Mithila) forming a ring around the central stem or stalks found both in Sanchi and Mithila, probably speak of the survival of an ancient tradition in the comparatively isolated society of today's Mithila.

In general, the lotus is the symbol of culture and civilization. Talking about the importance of lotus, Tulsi Das has used lotus three hundred and fifty two times in *Ram Charit Manas*. He also compares every organ of Ram and Sita with lotus. In *Geet Govinda*, Jay Deva compares the beauty of Krishna with blue lotus. In one context, great poet of Mithila, Vidhyapati, compares his heroine's face with lotus and the moon. The use of lotus is not only in paintings but there are so many literatures,

sculptors, and other art works that include lotus as spiritual aspects of life. Lotus is also the symbol of happiness, peace and prosperity.

Bamboo grove in the above figure metaphorically represents the bridegroom, the symbolic male counterpart of the female motif of marriage. As the lotus plant motif represents female fertility, the bamboo grove motif epitomizes the male regenerative energy, though not the male sexual organ as some writers suggest. The bamboo plant, which has a masculine gender in Maithili, multiplies and spreads rapidly and has therefore become associated with male fertility. At the time the ritual offering of vermilion is made in the *kohbar-ghar*, the bride offers it to the painted symbol of a bamboo grove and the groom to the lotus plant.

A hazy and dreamy impression of an ocean of small, pointed green leaves quivering in the smooth flow of summer breezes whistling through a dense bamboo grove perhaps provides the basis for the pictorialisation of this motif. Innumerable, fibrous lines- intertwined, staggered or parallel-capture the spirit of a dense, rapidly spreading bamboo grove. These fibrous masses are organized into diagrammatic motif which then adopts the forms of a lotus medallion, a tree medallion, or a fish medallion often incorporating in its conception, systematically, arranged images of elephants, parrots, peacocks or fish in amorous pairs.

The bamboo has very important role in Maithili life pattern, due to its usefulness it is said that bamboo is friend of life and death. It is also the symbol of worldly development and lineage growth. In *kohbar* painting, the middle portion of bamboo is intersected with main *purain* and encircled with six other *purains* which symbolizes the daily intercourse of bride and grooms. The flower of bamboo is the symbol of unity of *purush* (male) and *prakriti* (nature). At the same time, it is the

symbol of patience because when there is complete draught, in that condition also the bamboo flowers bloom.

Latpatia Suga (a couple of parrots) in this figure, literally symbolizes 'parrots in union', this motif of two parrots flying in circles, chasing one another in erotic play is painted in virtually every elaborate *kayasth* marriage ceremony especially in *kohbar-ghar*. The motif represents the union of the bride and the groom.

In the *Dharmasastras*, as also in Sanskrit love poetry, one finds repeated references to *chakravaka* birds (*Anas cassarca*) that are supposed to be separated and to mourn in the night. It is interesting to note here that the name *chakravaka* owes its origin to the 'a-oung' call of the bird, resembling the sound of a rusted wheel mounted on a wooden axle.

In the context of the ceremony of marital consummation, one of the *Griha Sutr*s cites the following mantra. "The concord that belongs to the *chakravaka* birds, that is brought out of the rivers of which divine *Gandharras* is possessed, thereby is concordant".(131)

This reference in Sanskrit literature makes it evident that the union of man and woman is symbolized by a pair of birds, and the occurrence of the painted motif of *latpatia suga*, two parrots flying in circles engaged in erotic play, on the wall of nuptial chamber where marriage is consummated, further testifies to the continuity of symbols and motif from the past, cutting across cultural strata.

This pictorial rendering differs to a degree from artist to artist. Usually, to attain the circular movement of the birds, the body of each one is elongated and curved to form a semicircle. Disproportionately small wings are shown issuing from the bodies in order not to dissipate the sense of concentric movement. This *latpatia suga* also symbolizes the religious permission to intercourse the bride and groom.

Similarly, sun and moon have also specific symbolic meaning in the figure. The painting of the sun and the moon can abundantly be found in Mithila. They are symbol of long life. In Mithila region, sun and moon both are equal to god. In *Chhatha* festival, all the Maithil worship the sun and there are many floor paintings (*Aripana*) representing the sun. Without sun our life in the earth cannot exist so it is very significant for all of us. More than that in Mithila culture sun is the mother goddess and all Maithil women fast during *Chhatha* festival and wish for children and healthy future. Similarly, moon has also a great importance in Mithila, in *Chauthchand (Chaurchan)*, which is held in month of Bhadau on the fourth day of moonlight night, Maithils worship moon for their wish fulfillment.

In marriage painting, the sun and the moon represent warmth and coolness. Bride and groom at the honeymoon night before and during sexual intercourse are very hot like fire which is represented by the sun but after play they become cool like the moon. Therefore, in marriage life, the sun and the moon have importance. Some scholars also opine that the sun and the moon are the goddesses in front of which the bride and the groom play their sexual act with religious mind.

Eye in Mithila painting is very significant because it represents the *nainajogin* which saves us from evil spirit. Without eye we cannot enjoy the beauty of the world and nature. There are many poets who appreciate the beauty of eye and compose beautiful poem.

In marriage painting especially in *kohbar* painting, we find that both bride and groom looking at each other take the enjoyment of their every organ. The eye is the first organ that brings them very close to each other and the eye contact of each other arises the passionate feeling towards each other for further sexual intercourse. It is the eye through which they perceive all the beauty of the marriage painting. Most of the

ladies are regarded beautiful with their beautiful wide and big eye i.e. *Mriganayani* and *Minakshi* so eye motif is very significant of marriage painting.

Fish and turtle in the above figure have common symbolic meaning. Fish is here the symbolic representation of love, good luck and fertility like *Madhushrawani* painting. And tortoise in the figure symbolizes long life. Maithil people wish that the bride and groom should have long life and should enjoy their marriage life for long time.



Fig.4. *Swastika (Bharni Style)*

Swastika itself depicts a symbolic meaning. "The *Swastika*" is the old cross and emblem in the world. The word *swastika* is derived from the Sanskrit *swastika*, meaning any lucky or auspicious object, and in particular a mark made on persons and things to denote good luck. The symbol of *swastika* has been used since Harappa Age. It forms a combination of four "L's" standing for Luck, Light, Love and Life. It is claimed that the Mound Builders and Cliff Dwellers of Mexico, central America consider '*The Swastika*' a charm to drive away evil and bring good luck, long life

and prosperity to the possessor. It has been found in ancient Rome, excavations in Grecian cities, on Buddhist idols, on Chinese coins dated 315 B.C., our own Nepal and Southwest Indians use it as an amulet. The use of the *swastika* in domestic ornament was fairly common in the nine teenth century. I have seen a beautiful white wedding dress, circa 1900, covered all over with embroidered swastikas. It came from the trousseau of a Polish-German immigrant woman, a "mail-order-bride" who was married in the U.S.

The *swastika* symbol is one of the oldest symbols on the Earth and can be found It is also widely used in Mithila. It is used as *mantra* and images for auspiciousness and peace. There is a belief that the mantra of *swastika* harmonizes the heart and mind. The *swastika* mantra is useful when we build house, time of marriage ceremony, sowing seeds in the field, beginning of journey, in business, and at the time of child birth. So, we can say its symbolic meaning is determined according to occasions and context.

In Mithila painting (*Aripanas*), the symbol of *swastika* is the combined form of Ganesh and his two wives (Riddhi and Siddhi). Conch-shell *swastika* is the symbol of Ganesh and prosperity. Almost every religious ceremony includes *swastika* to make or bring good fortune. If the same *Swastika* is used in *Mdhushrawani Aripana*, it represents Sasthi goddess. Sasthi goddess is considered as mother goddess of Maithil women who generate motherly power in young girls. So, here we can say without any hesitation that *Swastika*, here is the symbolic representation of mother. *Sastha Dal Aripana* is made to please the Mother goddess Bhagwati.

Swastika is also an ample example that functions as decorative form and enhances the meaning of the contents. In itself, it is an archetypal symbol of spiritual

power in Aryanism and also stands for truth and holiness.

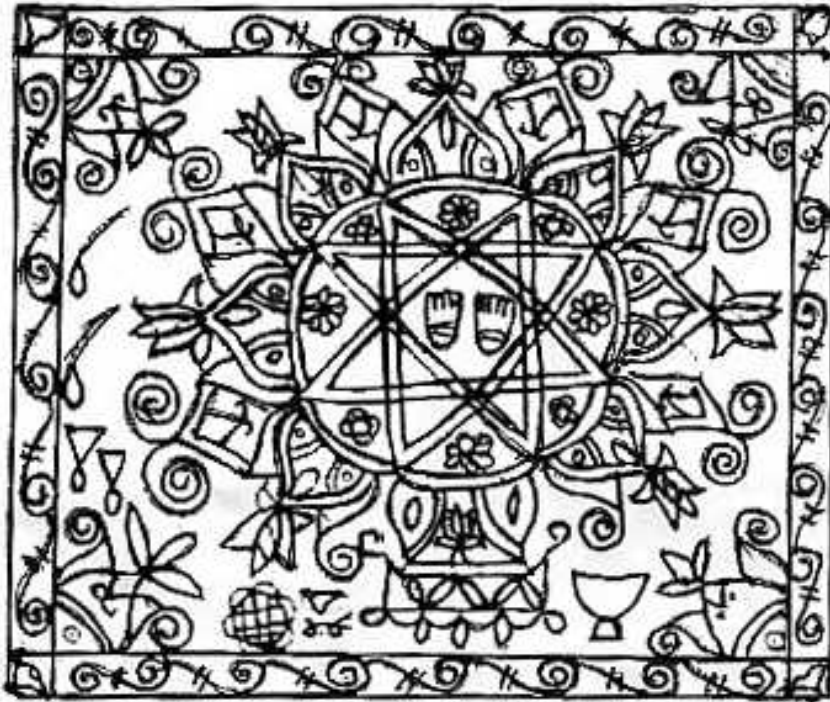


Fig.5. An *Aripana* for 'Ekadashi Puja'

In *Ekadashi Puja Aripana*, there are many symbols. Among them some major symbols are tools and household items, feet imprint in the centre, lotus flower and *ghanti ful* and so on. As we look at this *Aripana*, what comes first to our mind is a perfect decorative symmetry of a *mandala*. Though, the ritualistic *Aripanas* painted on the floors are not so colorful, balanced and minutely designed like Buddhist mandalas, they share some common features. For instance, both types of painting suggest tantric encloement of the concerned deities within the holy patterns and they represent the whole cosmic energy and entities.

The original form of a common *Aripana* is a fusion of semi-geometrical and floral diagram with each diagram having a well defined centre in which a sacred plate and pot are kept for ritualistic purposed (Rakesh 15). This is a common paraphernalia in almost all the religious ceremonies or pujas of Hindu.

This is a special Aripana design for the worship of god *Vishnu* and goddess *Laxmi* on *Ekadashi Puja* of Kartik month. Different tools and household items are depicted with the hope that god *Vishnu* and goddess *Laxmi* will bless the family with prosperity. The imprints of a pair of holy pace at the centre of the diagram are symbolic representation of a couple of god inside the pattern. And lotus flowers around the circle have common symbolic meaning in *Madhushrawani*, *kojagrat Aripanas* but differ in symbolic meaning of *Bamboo Grove Penetrating the Lotus Leaves* (fig.3).



Fig. 6.A painting with Nature and Animal Motifs

Animals used in Mithila painting especially in Aripanas are mythical, each animal is symbolic agent for fertility, prosperity, and rain. The symbolic connotation of these animals lies in religion, belief and myth. For instance, cow (*Gauri*) was the most favourite beast and company of Lord Krishna. That is why he is also called *Gopala*, which means a cow herd. From the time of god Krishna onward, cow has

been treated as a sacred beast and she is worshipped as mother. Similarly, another frequently depicted animal elephant (*gaja*) is also a mythical animal which stands for rain and fertility. Most of these animals and nature symbols stand for auspiciousness.

Every aspect of Mithila art manifests its close affinity with nature and animal. Everything used in painting is sacred and filled with reverential emotions. Even the pigments made from natural extracts like clays, plants, flowers and coals, and the brushes made from cotton piece and bamboo twig are treated as sacred substances. The paintings made on mud walls, floors and other household objects are not only the aesthetic manifestation of their life pattern which consists of their belief, rituals and myth, rather they dignify the mute glory of nature and her flora and fauna, sustaining and rearing their lives. Even the animals are treated in sacred ways, as alternate from the gods. Even animals and birds allude to some religious myth and symbolize power. Frequently, they function as vehicles and messengers for gods and goddesses. For example, parrot of Kamdeva, peacock that alludes to god Krishna, tortoise and fish that refer to god Vishnu's first incarnation. The elephant of god Indra which stands for rain, lion as vehicle of goddess Durga, swan as vehicle of goddess Saraswati and so on. The cow and elephant are supposed to be more sacred than other animals. It is peculiar that many times elephants are depicted in pregnant condition, which is a symbol of fertility and auspiciousness.

This painting *Bhai Dooj Rangoli* (fig.7.) is based on the worshipping of cow (*Gauri Pujan*). In Maithili culture cows are treated as sacred animals. She is often envisaged as matriarchal deity in the form of demi-goddess. The projection of *Gauri* in this form has special significance. According to Hindu scriptures, cow descended from heaven for the welfare of mankind. Besides, she is the most favorite beast of god

Krishna. That is why, everything she gives to mankind is sacred; milk, cow dung, urine. Among the long chain of festivities throughout the year, a whole day is spared for cow- worshipping, that is *Gobardhan Puja or Gauri Puja*.



Fig.7. Preeti Thakur. *Bhai Dooj Rangoli (Aripana)*

Fig.8. Gunjan Karn. Lotus (*aripana of bhai dooj, 2009*)

Aripanas of Bhai dooj (fig.7 and 8) depict symbols like peacock, fish, betel leaves, nuts, *kumkum* (turmeric), *chandan*, *kajal*, sacred pot, and coins. These symbols have specific symbolic meaning here which are quite different than previous painting. *Bhai Dooj* itself is observed as a symbol of love and affection between brothers and sisters celebrated in Mithila (in Nepal) and in India with great enthusiasm. On this festival, the sisters put the *teeka* on the forehead of their brothers with vermilion, sandal paste, *roli* or *kumkum* (red turmeric) and pray for them.

The paintings show a *Bhai Dooj Rangoli (Aripana)*. Many rites and rituals have been used in the past in Nepal as well as in India to please the deities and bring peace and harmony to the home. On such tradition, to ward off evil spirits, Rangolis (*Aripanas*) were drawn on the floor near the main doorway to the house. *Rangoli*, a spiritual art form has been widespread all over Nepal and India.

Rangoli Aripan (fig.7) is associated with Maharashtra culture and *Aripana of Bhai Dooj* (fig.8) is related with another part of Mithila regions. In Maharashtra, Maithils draw such type of *Aripanas or Rangolis* on the auspicious occasion of *Bhai Dooj*. Peacock and fishes are prominent symbols of that very painting. Peacocks are here the symbolic representation of god Krishna. In some paintings (*Aripanas*) peacock is the symbolic representation of welfare and calmness. But nowadays we can find they use peacocks and fishes with different motifs. The modern painters often use them in their paintings just for decoration. Here in the above *Rangoli Aripana* (fig.7) we can see two pairs of peacocks; one pair is at the top level and pair at the bottom. In the central part of this figure there is Lotus flower which is surrounded by two another layers and around those very layers (circles) there are peacocks' feathers. They are symbolic ones.

Lotus flower here represents Radhe and Feathers are part of Krishana. This shows love of Krishana for Radhe. There are fishes around the next circle. Fishes symbolically represent good luck. In the previous figure fishes were symbolically represented as love, auspiciousness, god Vishnu, pure mind and innocence. But if we look at the figure in the complete form (as a whole) then you can find it in betel leaf (*paan ke paat*) shape. I mean to say, betel leaf is also very prominent symbol of this ceremony. Therefore, betel leaves are symbolically used in both *Rangoli Aripana* and *Aripana of Bhai Dooj* (fig.7 and 8). If we analyze it here then it represents auspiciousness. The same betel leaf is used in marriage *Aripana* to increase the fertility and recreate energy in the body.

House of betel leaf (*paan ke ghar*) is very common motif in Mithila region. It depicts a beautiful structures covered with betel leaf creepers. Betel is planted near a pond or inside a thatched roof hut. The plant is considered to be very pious and auspicious. It is thought to increase fertility and energy in the body. The betel leaf is very common in this region, so chewing betel is the life pattern of Maithil people. It is chewed by bride groom in the marriage ceremony and taken to be auspiciousness.

In this context Rebati Raman Lal says, “In *Kohbar* also bride groom is provided with prepared betel having *Choona and Kattha* whereas white colour of *choona* represents semen of bride groom and red colour of *kattha* represents ovum of bride which connotatively is the preparation for intercourse” (138).

Kajal in the *Rangoli Aripana* (fig.7) is the symbolic representation of guard (*Kawachh*) which is used to ward of or evade evil spirits out of the door. If we go through the origin of *Bhai Dooj*, we can find the story of Ganga and Yamuna. In the beginning Ganga called his brother Yamuna in *Bhatridutiya or Bhai Dooj* to share love. Ganga wished long and happy life of his brother. As Ganga wished for her

brother, Maithil women wished for their brothers now. So, almost all the symbols in the ceremony (*Bhai Dooj*) are related with love, long life, peace, and harmony.

To conclude, Mithila folk arts specially *Aripanas* use different symbols, i.e. flora and fauna symbol like lotus, leaves, trees, fishes, tortoise, snakes, elephant, peacock, parrot and astrological symbols like sun, moon, and so on. They are used in different *Aripanas* but their symbolic representation varies according to context and ritual performances. It proves that *Aripanas* and their performances are symbolic.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

Mithila is an ancient and artistic land on the map of Nepal. Her artistic history is very glorious and at the same time golden. The Maithila arts is a saga of continuous traditions and rituals, which never dies. The charm of basic colors and forms, peculiarity in imaginative depiction of a pleasant world within harmony of folk art, nature, ritual performance and co-existence of all the living beings have made Mithila arts 'timeless images'. Besides, folk arts is the most loved cultural heritage not only in Nepal and India but all over the world. The cultivation of Mithila folk arts since ages is an artistic manifestation of the innate love for beauty, forms and colors. Besides, handicrafts are the integral part of the life of the Maithil women. For centuries, they have been preserving the secrets and charms of their most ancient and beautiful crafts. However, there are some problems like generation gap and the problem of continuing the legacy.

In chapter I, the researcher has discussed that the real inspiration behind the performance of Mithila folk art is religious motives. Originally the paintings were performed as religious tribute to their deities. I also discussed the history of Mithila folk arts and how it came to its present condition from wall and floor to paper. The categorization of Mithila painting is also presented.

In the second chapter the researcher has talked about the different types of symbols and images used in art works. From when and how symbols had and have been used. From that very chapter we also got information that symbols in art are our oldest form of visual communication and convey meaning beyond what's obvious. Symbols are pictures, images or objects used to represent ideas, concepts, beliefs, attitudes or feelings. They can have deep meaning and can evoke powerful emotion. There we also have talked about universal symbols like Peacock, cloud, rose, ect. and their use in work of art.

In chapter three, the researcher have tried to show that Mithila arts have their own symbolic significance and motifs, which is very close to the life pattern of Maithils that they spend. And readers also came to know that why they use particular Symbols and images in particular Aripanas.

Mithila painting (*Aripan* painting) is the heart of Mithila culture through which they speak the inherent significance of human life. Images used in *Aripana* painting, have their own ritual significance. In folk arts, meaning of a symbol is essentially a public symbol. The increasing social disintegration is weakening the meaning of public symbols. Meanings are lost with every other cultural disintegration in a folk society. Whereas, in modern arts, this does not happen because symbols are often idiosyncratized private symbols. Every viewer looks upon them with his/ her own meaning. The fluctuation and changes in the contents and their subject matters also creates paradoxes in meanings. However, relatively, that is a positive aspect because it increases the scope and creativity in arts.

Aripanas are enriched with different tantric features, archetypal symbols and motifs. Symbols like lotus, swastika, conch-shell, snake, moon, sun and geometric signs like triangle, square, octagon, sestagon, circle and curves enhance the decorative pefection and tantric enclosurement. The enclosurement suggests dwelling or confinement of divine spirit within the design. This concept is somewhat similar to Tibetan tantric mandala. Lotus is the symbol of female beauty, fertility, love, culture and civilization, happiness, peace and prosperity. *Swastika* and fish are symbolic representation of love, auspiciousness, good luck. Tortoise and sun are the symbol of long life. As a whole we can say that same symbols have multiple meanings. Same symbols used in different *Aripanas* have different meanings according to context and ritual performances.

Glossary

<i>Ahivat:</i>	unwidowed blessedness or long life of husband
<i>Archana:</i>	A form of worship
<i>Aripana:</i>	<i>Alepana or Aripana</i> is the Maithil version of the Sanskrit word <i>Alimpone</i> (a kind of ritualistic diagram like a <i>Mandala</i> , mainly painted on the floors for purification purpose)
<i>Avadh Suhag:</i>	Its symbolic meaning is husband like Ram Chandra.
<i>Bhakti:</i>	devotional attitude and extreme faith on gods and goddesses
<i>Bhumi puja:</i>	worshipping the land or soil
<i>Bat Vriksha:</i>	Banyan tree <i>Kalpataru:</i> the tree of eternity is a mythical tree which grows in the royal garden (<i>Nandan van</i> of lord Indra)
<i>Bharni style:</i>	The style in which Maithil painters use vibrant colors
<i>Brahma:</i>	creator of the universe
<i>Chaturthi:</i>	the fourth day or final day of marriage
<i>Chhaith:</i>	the name for the sacred performance, dedicated to the sun and observed on the sixth day of the bright half of the month of Kartik
<i>Deepawali:</i>	second greatest festival of Hindus, celebrated during the month of Kartik, festival of lights, prosperity, co-existence, brotherhood and so on.
<i>Devi:</i>	the great goddess of the Hindus.

<i>Durga:</i>	Violent form of Shakti; destroyer of demons, worshipped during Dashain festival.
<i>Durbadal:</i>	Basil plant's leaf
<i>Ganesh:</i>	the elephant headed god, a son of Shiva, who removes obstacle to new ventures and bring good luck, the god of prosperity and learning.
<i>Ganga:</i>	the sacred river Ganga of Northern India
<i>Geru Style:</i>	Traditional style of painting, lack of ornamentation and a black lines very prominent to identify this painting
<i>Gobar:</i>	cowdung
<i>Gosain ghar:</i>	prayer room for worshipping the family or sibling god
<i>Hajam:</i>	Barber, a caste whose hereditary occupation is to cut hair
<i>Hanuman:</i>	the name for the 'ape' who was a great devotee and servant of the epic God Ram. He is worshipped as a giver of physical strength, Son of <i>Vayu</i> .
<i>Indra:</i>	king god of heaven or gods' land, god of rain
<i>Kachani style:</i>	Mithila paintings which are still applying traditional way of making colors from the juices of locally available creepers and flowers
<i>Kama:</i>	sexual power or urge
<i>Kahar:</i>	A caste of domestic servants; members of this caste are specialized in carrying Palanquin
<i>Kalash:</i>	It is an earthen or metal water jar frequently used to invoke deity during ritual.

Kamadeva:	the Hindu god of love, is a son of Vishnu and Lakshmi, husband of Rati.
<i>Kamaldaha:</i>	a motif found in <i>Kohbar</i> paintings, which means lotus pond
<i>Kohbar ghar:</i>	where the <i>Kohbar</i> is painted; mostly a honeymoon chamber, nuptial Chamber.
<i>Kohbar:</i>	a kind of <i>Aripana</i> , which is mainly drawn on the wall during marriage ceremony.
<i>Krida:</i>	sexual intercourse or playful acts
Krishna:	the divine hero of the 'Mahabharat' epic and incarnation of god Vishnu.
Lakshmi:	female counterpart (Shakti) of god Vishnu, goddess of prosperity and rich.
<i>Lingum:</i>	male genital organ, phallus
<i>Latpatiya Suga:</i>	a pair of parrots, also known as parrots of Kama
<i>Maithil:</i>	people who live in Mithila region, a caste of Brahmin who falls in <i>Panch Gaur</i> division of Brahmin.
<i>Mandala:</i>	<i>mandalas</i> originally refer to Buddhist tantric <i>mandalas</i> which consist of the cosmic entities.
<i>Munj:</i>	craft similar to <i>Siki</i> , weaved with the grass called <i>Munj</i>
<i>Mantra:</i>	sacred Vedic words
<i>Marwa:</i>	A place where a little thatched and well decorated cottage is built for the sacred performances like <i>upanayan</i> , <i>vivah</i> etc. at Janakpur, a <i>marwa</i> is sacred center where marriage ceremony of god Ram and

	goddess Sita was performed.
<i>Mudekhai:</i>	gift for viewing the face of the bride
<i>Naga:</i>	A tribe of deities who is half human, half snake.
<i>Pan:</i>	Betel leaves chewed with arecanut, lime and spices
<i>Pandit:</i>	learned, title of address for Brahman, recites sacred books.
<i>Parvati:</i>	daughter of Hemant (Himalaya), wife of lord Shiva
<i>Pithar:</i>	rice flour paste
<i>Pooja:</i>	worshipping
<i>Purain:</i>	It denotes lotus leaves
<i>Purohit:</i>	A priest, especially a domestic priest
<i>Saraswati:</i>	female counterpart (Shakti) of god Brahma, goddess of wisdom, knowledge and arts
<i>Shakti:</i>	female counterparts of Hindu gods; many times they dominate the gods in power.
<i>Shiva:</i>	one of the three major gods in Hinduism, destroyer
<i>Shuva:</i>	auspiciousness, good Women
<i>Siki:</i>	craft of making household objects like baskets, trays, boxes etc. by weaving a grass called 'Siki'.
<i>Sindur:</i>	red powder (vermillion) put on forehead by Maithil women.
<i>Tantrism:</i>	religious sects in Hinduism and Buddhism, which believe in a mystical invisible power like Shamanism.
<i>Tika:</i>	a dab of paste that is applied to the forehead for religious or cosmetic purposes.

<i>Tulsi:</i>	Small <i>Basil</i> plant; considered as sacred and worshipped by the Hindu.
<i>Upanayan:</i>	the sacred thread ceremony, one of the sacraments of Brahmin, Kshetriya known as <i>Dwiz</i> .
<i>Varridutia:</i>	A ceremony celebrated by brothers and sisters (worshipping of brothers by their sister)
<i>Veda:</i>	Name of the religious text
<i>Vishnu:</i>	one of the three major gods in Hinduism, Operator, Preserver
<i>Vivah:</i>	the marriage ceremony
<i>Vrata:</i>	a kind of spiritual vow for women and commitment for devotion and sacrifices for their male members of family.
<i>Yoni:</i>	female genital organ, vagina

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