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Ecological Awareness: Matrimony of Agriculture and Art



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Abstract

This article examines how Mithila folk painting reflects ecological consciousness of the society and the intertwined Maithili life with local flora and fauna that consequently maintains natural environment intact in the region. At the onset of climate issue worldwide, folk painting of Mithila communicates its local as well as international spectators about the preservation of surrounding nature blending it with ritual phenomena, agrarian lifestyle and inculcating geographical values to the new generation through the visual depiction. Once the indigenous art, transformed into leading folk painting, due to commercialization has lifted its spiritual veil to worldly affairs. In this course of shift, ecology based painting proves to be a boon for the art lovers and buyers as it attempts to balance the degrading nature with its preservation technique appropriate to its own native land. A pivotal visualization of the merriment of lifespan and landscape amidst spirituality and perpetuity remains the characteristic feature of this indigenous art work.

Keywords: *Agriculture; Ecology; Folk Art; Spiritual; Commercialization*

Introduction

Mithila art is a visual commentary of local people whose main occupation is farming. Farming goes parallel to creation which is seen through the ethnic art version. The history of folk art goes back almost to the history of human civilization when people had different mode of living. As the time passes, mode of living consequently changes and leaves certain impact on art form. The contemporary Mithila art reflects agrarian culture where all sorts

of phenomena occurring in the daily life of Maithili people are depicted. “The topics ranged from family planning, the literacy campaign, and the dowry problem to environmental issues such as the planting of trees” (Hauser, 2002, p. 114). In this way, art captures the age of people and their culture. In this regard, Mithila art captures complex rituals of agrarian culture in the visual form to direct the society for better creation in the days to come.

The glorious tradition of Mithila folk arts has always represented the different ages of human civilization. In the very beginning, the cave painting, primitive frescos in iconic forms, and stone carvings were the first rudimentary forms of folk arts. Ancient Mithila was a fertile land for art and civilization. Although initial inspiration for these folk arts like other arts was religion, later their horizon of subject matter was broadened. In contemporary Mithila paintings, familiar subject matters like daily life, works, toils, beliefs, animals, plants, and the like can be found. Besides, “the art emerges as the suggestive sound pictures of the various environments; each art reflects the mental perception and awareness of the physical and cultural milieu” (Karan & Mather, 1976, p. 502). Maithili artists exploit various cultural symbols to reflect their social position regarding their surrounding environment.

Mithila society at present maintains agrarian mode of living where agriculture determines everything in public life. So, Mithila art exploits farming life style and identity of the locale in relation to their living. In course of representing geography and people, art visualizes the age and beyond. Therefore, art happens to form

its root within surrounding nature and ethnicity. Hence, Mithila art is the product of local natural objects and ethnic culture.

As a cultural practice of collective life pattern, Mithila art is often ceremonial. The ceremonial significance of this ethnic art is so much that any auspicious occasion becomes incomplete without it. It denotes the importance of art in Maithili society. Life is incomplete without art as reading between the lines of living reveals. Moreover, the content of art is ecological in nature. Ecology has been viewed as “nature and has served either as a back-ground in art or as the major theme in landscape art” (Neperud, 1997, p. 14). From the time of birth to death, art expresses every happenings of social life whether they are birth, marriage or death rituals without the expression of all these rituals in art forms every celebration is incomplete.

Therefore, art always merges the immediate surrounding with culture so that people won't feel dislocated and can construct themselves during destruction. So Neperud (1997) focuses how “art develops a sense of empowerment to recognize, improve, and reconstruct neglected environments

through individual and communal actions” (pp. 235-236). More often than not, agrarian art strives to remind and educate viewers of the value that the land holds, preserving the heritage and history of our agrarian roots for future generations.

Methodology

This research employs qualitative method of study with observation, interview and questionnaire as tools to data collection and environmental theme for data analysis. The resultant outcome figures out the local mode of preservation of the surrounding nature with locally developed traditional values, geographical flora-fauna and agrarian lifestyle. In Mithila culture, spiritual life remains integrated with day-to-day activities targeted at earning livelihood, this article contends that an individual lives intertwined with natural surroundings, the folk art dramatizes this phenomena. The attainment of self-realization, while still eking out bread and butter, comes from the philosophy of native wisdom. The philosophy of a balance between worldly pleasures and the mystical ecstasy, which the art exemplifies, also informs this art. In Maithili agrarian society, the philosophy manifests in the way the

everyday matters find primacy of space in artistic creations which also embody the artists’ ardour to be one with the divine/nature. In this regard, Chaudhuri (1955) asserts that Maithils seek spiritualism by not cutting themselves from *atman* (affection, intimacy)” (p. 163). Original inspiration for the protection of local flora and fauna seems inherent in the farming chores that make life and living of the native folks inseparable.

Discussion/Analysis

The sacred art of indigenous people offer them a medium to communicate with their ancestors, forefathers and family deities. In addition, ingenuity has kept the agrarian mindset resilient. The land and agrarian mindset are vital components to the success and preservation of our current culture. Besides, symbiotic relationship between art and the land, highlighting both artists who take their inspiration from agriculture and farmers who use art to inspire their labors are the traditional theme of Mithila art. In this regard, Aran (1997) aptly notes that traditionally Maithils have been drawing on mud walls and recently shifted on paper.

In this way, agrarian culture teaches responsibility to protect, preserve and celebrate life.

Agrarian Maithili culture inspires its ethnic art to exploit cultural artifices of its own location. To a great extent, all art forms- whether they are religious, social and agricultural as well as the fine blending of all these forms- are reflection of the available materials and their interaction with farming skills. Hence, art acts as a tool to manipulate people to preserve their surroundings. "Art is a tool for illustrating ecological concerns and a technology for conveying messages about ecology" (Neperud, 1997, p. 14). Thus, art brings agrarian values into light.

The farming knowledge and its consequent change due to the regular challenge to fulfill the demands of food to the society modifies the art forms regularly to cope with changing ethos of time. The artists shape their forms and develop it according to their intuitive organization of ideas. How these arts are a vital part of the Maithili culture can be understood in the words of Bhavnani (1974) "a deep need to create these things of beauty and utility since they are a vital part of their very existence and life pattern" (p. 9).

But the commercialization of these art forms has made artists depict even unique rituals on paper and clothes. Thus, agrarian culture is gradually shifting towards industrial sector simply to fulfill the demand of consumers in the market. However, the real ceremonial and cult value lies only in their ritualistic performance, not on professional reproduction of arts.

The wide depiction of every activities from the very beginning of the start of annual farming ceremony to the harvesting period easily communicate that Mithila art reflects agrarian culture of the region. Nevertheless, the women play a great role to hand over it from one generation to another. Likewise, Maithili women discharge the entire household activities like praying sibling god, and fasting on all the religious and social worships. Besides, they also commemorate and purify the occasion wearing ornaments and fasting sometimes for two or three days continuously. While doing so, they can meditate for long on art activities to confiscate the occasion in real sense.

Maithili women draw the figure of plough and other assisting articles like sickle, axe, spade, the symbols of good omen so that they can grow enough

food to maintain the family well. “Paintings which were pure and based on the artistic tradition of Mithila were most valuable” (Jain, 1980, p. 214). Because each lines and forms carry meanings, each performance is a moment of spiritual vow. The significance of performance mood is all that matters for the artists and the women are the artists to protect and enhance their cultural legacy. “The stooped figure concentrates, as if in prayer” (Jain, 1980, p. 211). An artist has to work as if she is coaxing the cosmic energy and interacting with the divine. Such meditative silence makes the art form a kind of prayer to god whom, as it is believed, to make all ends meet.

Besides, farmers plough the land and sow the seed, caring them as well as harvesting is the common practice among artists to portray. On the whole, farmers consider domestic animals as their own sibling, and worship them for their help and milk. Not only the terrestrial animals but also the aquatic ones are drawn to denote different motifs in daily and personal life of people. For instance, fish covers enough space in the local art form in Mithila region because it awakens the feeling for fertility and freshness. In addition,

other animals like snakes, scorpions and frogs, which play various roles to balance human life, are portrayed with great fun in different occasions.

And, these figures are drawn traditionally with mud on the mud walls of house, pots, and large vessels of grain. In this way, mud plays an integral part in the lives of agrarian Maithili people. In addition, women bring these motives in their art and empower themselves with several symbols used in their art. Besides, “art empowers not only to women but also to their off springs” (Jain, 1980, p. 209). Hence, the whole family cultivates an opportunity to move forward economically, socially and educationally.

Similarly, they enjoy and express their love towards birds as well. For example, cuckoo’s song inspires them to work diligently even in the scorching heat. Likewise, the parrot and its beautiful appearance provoke them to praise beautiful works and keep on trying for the best. In addition, love for migrated birds to Mithila region is enjoyed a lot by young girls and they sing song together making idols of the birds, and offer them so much love and care so that they will come every year. Birds with the major appendage in natural

beauty are also the beauty of this ethnic art. It inspires artists to move continuously in the work of creation.

Moreover, the innocent manners and performance of birds actually broaden the horizon of creation on the part of artists. Hence, nature is the major inspiration behind folk art, according to Bhavnani (1974), “Nature seems to have set the pattern for almost every creative urge and artistic endeavors, not only among the people in India but throughout the world” (p. 11). Learning by observing is natural among human since ancient time. Because of the constant touch with nature and their surroundings, people frame certain perception in their mind and the occupied acuity reflects through their expression. Consequently, the frame of ideas happens to generate originality after the interaction with other objects and living pattern of people.

Likewise these contiguous objects become symbols in the hands of artists to universalize the personal feelings. Mithila art is marked for the use of natural symbols rather than eccentric private symbols. However, modern art is deciphered after analyzing the private symbols which originally do not fulfill the public demands of easy information

in the fast growing age. Furthermore, the wide spread public symbol is understood by all in a folk artists’ community. Bell (1979) quotes Carl Jung, “the effective living symbol that evokes a universal response must contain an understanding shared by large number of people” (p. 213). Nevertheless, the symbols exploited in folk art are originally derived from their own primitive surrounding objects or their modified form at present. The purpose of the use of symbols is to transmit the common consciousness in open form so that unity among people and their identity can be framed simultaneously. Besides, these symbols set common goals in front of whole society to achieve together for all round welfare of the members inhabiting there.

Mithila art in general carries the legacy of people from antiquity. It demonstrates how people in the region have been carrying their culture since time immemorial. People are the product of their culture: they understand the world on the basis of the cultural glass they wear since their childhood. Besides the visual history, the folk art provides are not limited to its literal meaning; rather, it goes beyond and represents the entire custom, legacy,

living ways, and ritual occurrences in various occasion at different time intervals of their ancestor's life. The mutual blending of local colors, flora, fauna, and human sentiment make every folk art living throughout the history. However, art carries manifolds of meaning to envisage even what our naked eyes cannot. In this connection, Bell (1979) quotes Anton Ackermann, "All culture always appears to us in a double form. Culture is first the totality of material goods that a folk has created through its diligence" (p. 84).

Mithila art is the landscape where people of the region perform their regular ritual. The art in the form of a window provides a panorama of the culture where not only human beings but also the nature appears to be taking part in the struggle of life and living. Moreover, "landscape painting is essentially a romantic art, an art invented by a lowland people who had no landscape of their own" (Read, 1992, p. 163). Art is not confined within the fixed objects: the whole objects are treated as an art form. For instance, pottery, basket weaving, and the objects of daily use are considered as the single art form.

In addition, the dolls which act as both playing materials for children as well as a purse for adults are the single object having multiple businesses. Besides, "the more we understand art, the more we understand ourselves and the complexities of our world" (Cole & Gealt, 1989, p. vii). Thus, the entire culture can be viewed through the single artifact of society. Therefore, Herbert Read (1992) mentions, "art is the direct measure of man's spiritual vision" (p. 267). Moreover, every product of society has participatory role which generates meaning through visual language to guide an individual in collective form.

The whole agricultural mass at times depicted in art form carries special meaning. To illustrate, the bamboo and its collective root together denote to have many children in *Kohbar* painting; however, there are multiple meanings of the same object. Moreover, agrarian culture modifies the same object in various forms and the change in form leads to alter in structure that consequently shifts the meaning. However, the form provides holistic picture of the object. "The content, subject matter or meaning of a work of art is inextricably, related with its forms (form is a holistic term for mediums,

texture, structure, color, balance, proportion and space etc.)” (Bell, 1979, p. 213). Artists use all these things extracting from their surrounding that makes these local art carry its own geographical identity. The fine combination of all these local products provides Mithila art its own kind of form.

The plants which provide life to people supply content to their arts. The background of all art forms begins with flora available in the province which decodes art from the womb of nature. The juxtaposition of birds, animals and plants are largely the subject matter of Mithila art. The dolls which are the lovely companion of children are depicted on the walls, clothes, and almost all the objects which children look at and find wonderful. Since their childhood, they set a secure mission to live with common attitude with their fellow social mates. Thus, Mithila art becomes an indispensable form of Maithili culture which cannot remain without expressing the mute glory of agrarian life and culture. In this way, art for Maithili people is a means to express and communicate themselves with gods, nature and social realm in which they live.

Mithila art is a tool traditionally gifted to Maithils to impart values to the society in order to maintain it on the whole. It supplies collective significance of values and their worth in life. From decision making to discharging regular duties, the values of art influence every individual of the society. Such values alert people at every step in their life so that they can avoid unaccepted norms and conditions which people love to follow so as to keep everything intact. Furthermore, art is the reflection of what society expects from individuals.

However, the modes of art differ as the time changes. Traditionally, people had religiously loaded art forms in Mithila but they are changing regularly due to the change in attitude of people. Gradually, there are increasing media to compartmentalize the values in contemporary era. Consequently, the values are of social, political, religious and commercial in nature. All these values have different desire to fulfill like population, harmony, culture, and economy.

For progress, society needs certain social values to impart in its people so that these values will have expected result in the days to come. To fulfill this

need Maithili folk art exploits certain rituals in which art directs people what to observe for the collective welfare. Among several rituals, *Aripan* and *Kohbar* painting (nuptial chamber) are central to include major social values of Mithila. The forms, colors, images, lines, contents and subjects are all fused with values which may differ according to viewers.

Yet, the symbols carry more or less the same meaning because they are derived from the mutually acknowledged resources. The reflection of the charm of art qualifies it to have certain value like beauty. In addition, the beauty of art attracts every individual to look at it and gain aesthetic pleasure the same time. As Cassirer (1992) notices that “Beauty appears to be one of the most clearly known of human phenomena” (p. 926). It is this inclination towards beauty of art that makes people to experience the social standard.

The interaction with art takes people closer to truth. The artist fulfills the gap left by nature through several ethnic emblems. The emblems are the local icons familiar to all. In this regard, Cassirer (1992) further adds, “Art most of the time constructs and organizes our sense of human experience according to

its own formal principles” (p. 925). In fact, these ideologies carved as an art form gives originality and permanency of the ascribed truth of that community. For Gombrich (1991), “All art is fundamentally the making of images; the making of images is based psychologically on the making of substitutes” (p. 1082). Thus, the natural artifacts are imprinted as an art form to generate confidence among people to implement their belief in practical life.

The depiction of animals and plants in art not only conveys the general form of the object; rather, it also associates their potential qualities with their portrayal. For example, fish is swift as well as productive aquatic animal that gets place in nuptial chamber painting to help visualize the social message to be productive after marriage. Similarly, elephant as a fine portrayal suggests that one can be strong even on vegetarian food. Traditionally, people like to be vegetarian than non-vegetarian. Such message along with the social symbols is quite common phenomena of Mithila art basically to Maithili people. More often than not, symbols used in this folk art are permanent in nature and convey solid picture of the society. It is not like mainstream art as Gombrich (1991) quotes Heraclitus “The sun is new

everyday is true for the sun of the artist if not for the sun of the scientist” (p. 930). The artist captures the moment, not the ever durable scene because of its special importance in artistic world.

The exploitation of structure leads artist to intensify reality because it provides pleasure to them. The artist’s imitative mood becomes an inexhaustible source of delight for them. Cassirer (1992) quotes Aristotle “the reason of the delight in seeing the picture is that one is at the same time learning – gathering the meaning of things” (p. 927). Besides, art is conceived as an allegory, a figurative expression which under its sensuous form conceals an ethical sense. This ethical sense in art develops among people when it is regularly observed as part and parcel of living. While celebrating life through rituals in the form of festivals, occasions, and other various social nuances it ultimately ends in departing some message to the observer.

However, art possesses no independent value of its own. The same symbol appears different to each individual or it may seem the same. Moreover, art prepares people to live well and live for some goals: goals of progress drives people forward to achieve collective

aspiration. Therefore, Cassirer (1992) mentions, “in the hierarchy of human knowledge and of human life art is only a preparatory stage, a subordinate and subservient means pointing to some higher end” (p. 926). It is more useful in the social setting where one needs other to cooperate and move forward like the juxtaposition of different materials to produce a fine art.

Likewise, Cassirer (1992) quotes Simonides “Painting is mute poetry and poetry a speaking picture” (p. 927). Where the silence of materials in art keep on conveying people with its own visible form, everything people like to derive. Besides, Cassirer (1992) points out, “Artist releases his forms from the necessity of belief, the work of art tells us what it tells us by its total structure, not by assertions abstracted from its reality” (p. 925). Hence, the format designed out of locally available materials indicate the purpose of Mithila art to fulfill local motive spreading its own social message.

Social values in Mithila largely depend on the occasion. Basically, *Kohbar* painting serves as the juncture from where social ethics can be easily interpreted. Nuptial chamber is the vibrant place where exotic, intricate,

and exuberant paints are employed with many symbolic images like the lotus plant, bamboo grove, fish, birds and snakes in union. Each symbol carries its own ideals but the major ones are fertility, sexual ability and proliferation of life. Nevertheless, there is one thing special about the red color: it is taken as auspicious and hence it is widely used.

Moreover, the elephant, horse, and palanquin are the symbols of royalty and richness. Likewise, the goose and peacock are symbols of welfare and calmness. Similarly, *Paan* (betel leaves) and lotus symbolize good luck. Finally, “bans (bamboo) is the symbol of future progeny” (Rakesh, 1991, p. 94). These symbols are so common that people take no time to understand and apply them in their daily life. The abundance of these symbols in Mithila has made social values a part of living well.

While exploiting these symbols, ignorant Maithili women do not use any idea rather express whatever they feel spontaneously. But, without violating any traditional structure, they use their feelings, emotions and tradition alive through the folk art form. Cassirer (1992) quotes Rousseau, “Art is not a description or reproduction of the empirical world but an overflow of

emotions and passions” (p. 927). This rightly justifies the overall sentiment of Maithili women. Moreover, Cassirer (1992) also quotes Mallarme, “Art is not written with ideas, it is written with words, images, sounds, and rhythms” (p. 929). Maithili women use lines, colors, pigments, symbols, and metaphors to keep the age old social values living through their ethnic art.

Social values like integration, harmony, co-operation, and co-existence are the major theme of Mithila art. This age old common style points out the equilibrium in the society and the whole proprietorship goes to the values allocated in the folk art. According to Eliot (2004), “the age which manifests the greatest extremes of individual style will be an age of immaturity or an age of senility” (p. 498). The content of art and people has very long rooted relationship even if by chance there is something wrong they feel deeply hurt.

The relation between values and people is quite sensitive and strict in that it binds their entire life within the set standard. So, the subject in art marks public feeling and even moves them for certain activity. Edgar (2001) points out that “the subject is rather the unfolding product of an engagement with nature

and the given cultural environment” (p. 115). Hence, nature and culture mix together to produce for people certain values which have provided a systematic outlook of the society.

Politically speaking, Mithila art sets standard for inclusive society. In fact, it constitutes all locally available materials, plants, and animals to justify that politically there is a set standard to practice. The social structure may fall down if there is a lack of practice of the inclusive mode of politics. Even if real life does not experience it, nature dilutes the political pressures and conflict in the society. Therefore, Edgar (2001) quotes Lowenthal “The identification of the individual with nature represents the possibility of an escape from social pressures and conflicts” (p. 111). Women express themselves politically through the folk art from the ancient time which symbolizes the fine arrangement of the society because the communication purgates people and the art provide the context to do in the purification of the inner contents of mindset. Edgar (2001) further quotes Lowenthal “A work of art communicates with its audience” (p. 112). Obviously, art possesses some fixed ideology through which to shape an individual politically.

Democratically, art values everyone equal and does not discriminate one from another. Mithila art includes all on the basis of their occupation. Although people are divided according to occupational castes, they are united to make a whole out of parts. Nevertheless, the casteism in the present time appears burden as well as invites psychological gloom. Only the best work of art heals people out of anguish. Therefore, Edgar (2001) suggests “Genuine works of art objectify this despair” (p. 113). Is there a classic type of set standard for the voice of the voiceless or not? The answer is quite clear as art clarifies society and particularly, the Mithila art has participatory mode of presentation where even the people from the lowest caste participate to silhouette the complete art work.

Movement towards complexity in the folk art reveals the progress towards classic version of art. Such type of revolutionary step marks the overall change in the belief system which ultimately emancipates each category of people. Moreover, the collective shades of feeling are evaporated for the healthy political society. More often than not, artists have represented their age, society, political system, and

economical base where common people are clearly seen through the contemporary art form. But the progress is vivid when Eliot (2004) marks “One of the signs of approach towards a classic style is a development towards greater complexity of sentence and period structure” (p. 499). Furthermore, Edgar (2001) quotes Adorno “Art works to riddles, each work is an attempt to solve the riddles posed by its predecessors” (p. 118). Thus, society experiences liberation to express each individual exactly what they are.

Similarly, religious depiction is the most common content of Mithila art. The entire locality is in the grip of Hindu mythology since time immemorial. The Hindu epics like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Geeta*, and their true lesson equally applicable in all the ages of human life reveal the essence of this folk art. The religion is the metaphor of moral truth as Cassirer (1992) states, “art can be described as an emblem of moral truth” (p. 926). Although Hindu priests have developed fatalism in the society imposing caste system, “casteism developed fatalistic society” (Bista, 1991, p. 4). The fine blending of religion and morality helped people easily accept the imposed norms though

it was against their equality. As work is worship, art equalizes everyone through its expressive mode of imparting education, “the distinction between scientific knowledge and knowledge in art lies only in art’s mode of presentation” (Edgar, 2001, p. 117). And the staging of Mithila art is always participatory that makes the age old religious tradition lively even during the present period.

It is the religion which creates balance in society despite several revolutionary steps. And it is the art which exploits religion to reflect all the virtues of human life. Art can be compared to adolescent as Eliot (2004) argues, “the young artist revolts as well as preserves essential family characteristic” (p. 499). In fact, the depiction of religious content makes Mithila art full of epical nuances where standard is always to be met and the folk art makes public life ever progressive to achieve the virtues like patience, noble, respect to older, love to younger, loyalty to wife, and model for all in all round behavior as mentioned in the Hindu epics. Thus, the age old religion inspires people to preserve one’s culture as Eliot (2004) further mentions, “the collective personality, so to speak, realized in the literature of the past—and the

originality of the living generation” (p. 499). Hence, the continuation of creating art is possible due to religious motive to capture the essence of the society despite the changing time to bring people on track at all times.

Commercialization has really wrought the modern world and its effect is easily seen at every corner. Mithila art is not the exception. The emerging artists take creation of art as both from professional as well as artistic purpose because they have to fulfill their economical and artistic need at the same time. The economy at the present time matters a lot to determine individual life style as Edgar (2001) quotes Lowenthal “Art would manifest traces of its mediation by the economic and class structures of the society within which it was produced and consumed” (p. 115). The economic base of society shapes the artistic creation produced there.

However, commercial motive of art has exploited current exciting theme which can easily be popular in the market. Despite the aesthetic value of art, it does contain economic value to sustain artists with their art. Meanwhile, they entertain vulgar theme in their creation which can lead society towards vulgarity as well as people from outside may figure out

something misleading about the culture. It should be objective than having other sentiment on the part of artist while designing art. In this regard, Cassirer (1992) adds, “Art is an intensification of reality” as well as art is one of the ways leading to an objective view of things and of human life (p. 929). If the current trend persists, it will damage originality of the culture and society that will further lead people having no importance of advocating their ancestral root. In other words, people will find themselves without identity. So, it must be preserved and art should only be for its own sake.

In the course of time, increasing population is certainly the cause of environmental degradation but the large amount of symbols used in art signifies that the balance of ecology is essential in the surrounding. The bond of people with their environment is so profound that they plant siblings on the birth of their babies and keep on planting every year on the occasion of their birth day. People know that coming generation may suffer if ecological balance is not maintained. Regarding this attitude, Thapa (1988) asserts, “Cause of all suffering of mankind is the mistake of their past lives” (p. 110). The anthology of all these things in Mithila

art reveals the essence of Maithili culture towards ecology on agrarian, religion, and social ground. Thus, art alerts people from deviation.

The depiction of agrarian values throughout the local art vividly pronounces the affinity of people with their surroundings. On the one hand, over- population limits the resource while, on the other hand, environmental degradation affects the economic condition of people. Consequently, the bitter experience of poverty perverts standard culture of society. According to Hamal and Pokhrel (2009), “Massive poverty increases people’s dependency on environment resulting depletion of the resources” (p. 123). Environmental degradation limits the survival opportunities of the poor and thereby pushing them into poverty trap. Thus, poverty does not become a cause; rather, it is a consequence of misuse of environmental resources.

People in agrarian society totally base themselves on the available natural resources. The plenty of them provide people confidence to step forward the social development. In fact, environment provides endowment and entitlement of opportunities to those who do not own other resources

especially in Maithili society. However, unequal distribution of the environmental opportunities and limited survival strategies are the catalysts that influence environment and economy. Moreover, Hamal and Pokhrel (2009) add, “the state of the natural environment is therefore central to the livelihoods, health and security of millions of people living in poverty and therefore to pro- poor growth” (p. 124). Mithila art captures this entire scenario to mirror the life and living ways of people in detail focusing the flora and fauna at the centre.

Along with agriculture, religious mode of society further exploits natural entities at the centre to commemorate life on earth. While talking about the life of Ram, the protagonist in the *Ramayana*, or the life of *Pandawas* (characters in the *Mahabharata*) in the forest, the art does not describe their ethos of life only but depicts the ecological importance in the life of human beings. More often than not, the illustration of the empathy towards nature and people traditionally provokes the indigenous art to centralize it while depicting socio-cultural aspects of the region. In this connection, Bhattarai (2009) explains, “how from the ancient time literature has been describing the

beauty and ugly faces of nature” (p. 102). The Maithili art visualizes this religious panorama of the locality to fulfill the inherent mission of society for ecological balance.

People in Mithila have specially two extra things which really function as the balancing factors for ecology in the region: they are women and soil, equally fertile in nature. On the one hand, women are creative and progenitor of Mithila art to reflect exactly the way things happen. On the other hand, soil is so fertile that anything grows vehemently in abundant amount, enough for people to enjoy life. Moreover, Thapa (1988) mentions, “Soil is of good quality for agriculture and sufficient rainfall for healthy crops in Mithila region” (p. 131).

Likewise, women’s affinity with natural objects of the surrounding makes them draw fish, elephant, and bird on their daily use products which indicate how nature closely guard the eventual feat of people in Mithila. Gombrich (1991) quotes Sesson, “Women are closer to nature than men” (p. 1083). However, women do not forget to add male activities in their art; rather, they capture them to show their life is incomplete without each other.

The representation of the self through art and depiction of nature in the art juxtaposes society and nature to balance life through art. The deep ecological vision of the society gets its nurturing through its identification with surrounding environment. Thus, a kind of spontaneous relation is established with immediate nature where saving environment is saving oneself. In this context, Schopenhauer (1991) quotes Arne Naess, “if reality is like it is experienced by the ecological self, our behavior naturally and beautifully follows norms of strict environmental ethics” (p. 1). Moreover, art makes itself living through the utilization of well-balanced social and natural phenomena in Mithila where one is indistinguishable from another. Consequently, the fine blend of life and surrounding in Mithila art makes people connote life is nature, and nature, the life. In this way, any sad event on the part of nature hurts human, hence, people attempt for no natural imbalance in the region.

Conclusion

To sum up, art borrows agrarian structure to mold itself into a system where mode of living in conjugation with immediate environment becomes a

remarkable theme of Mithila art. However, the resultant system in the society is the product of interaction among various members and the art makes people realize the most suitable way to express themselves in their surroundings. Maithili women are the chief progenitors of Mithila who express their culture in artistic way. Although the nature of art is temporary, it has been passing from generation to generation solely depending on its own local resources. In fact, the association of human with super natural beings (spiritual vow) further adds the importance of ecological symbols to alert common folk of the region. The custom of drawing art on the earth vividly explains the importance of land in the life of Maithili people. Most notably, the floor painting 'Aripan' and the wall drawing 'Kohbar' signify inclination towards occupational demeanor of Maithili people.

Disclosure Statement

The author declares that no potential conflict of interest exists.

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Author Biosketch

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