Final Report

<u>Tagore Research Scholarship for the Cultural Research</u>

<u>for the year 2017-18</u>

<u>No: 3/57/2015-SD/AM (Vol-1)</u>

Project Title

A Survey Research into the

**Cultural Practices of Traditional Philosophical
Knowledge in Mithila (North Bihar)**

Submitted to

Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts

Ministry of Culture, Government of India

BY

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Abstract

Philosophy is a critical self-analysis of a particular culture. Culture is the creation for which philosophy provides the basis and insights whereas cultural practices form, enrich and improve philosophical knowledge. Culture, generally defined as the 'way of life' or the 'pattern of living', is contextualized, described with an available historical account, and positioned in different settlements. The philosophical concepts are embedded in the cultural practices in the form of the arts, folklores, cultural artefacts, traditional occupational knowledge, social structure and various aspects of individual, social and natural life. In this study, Philosophy is taken into the public domain exploring philosophical thirst and inquiries found among the common people and reflected through cultural practices. The study has focused on specific knowledge development in the domain of culture, empirical aspects of that knowledge base in society, and its influence on life in Mithila. The role of philosophy in this regard is to examine the very basis of those conditions which constitute the culture.

The study has taken a research framework based on the philosophical concepts prominently reflect in the cultural practices. The concepts have served as the hypothetical ground for this investigation into the intricacies of how culture and creativity are conceived, practiced and transformed into knowledge?

A huge repertoire of knowledge exists in this domain and so does an impressive array of the practices, however highly condensed in some cases or scattered in others. The study has tried to reflect on various philosophical propositions found in the cultural practices as well as mentioned, acknowledged and described important contributions of individuals. This report contains an explanation of the study framework, tools of the study, data analysis as well as a bibliography.

Acknowledgement

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Title

A survey research into the Cultural Practices of Traditional Philosophical Knowledge in Mithila (North Bihar)

Cultural Region of Mithila (Includes the areas of North Bihar, adjacent Terai Nepal and Maithil Diaspora)

Rationale

India is home to a variety of cultures and creative traditions. The argumentative thought processes and the heritage of socio-cultural synthesis and constructions are well-assimilated into society. There are multiple perspectives exist, related to human life, social system, ethical norms, construction of knowledge, or metaphysical inquiries. This study delves into some of these questions of human-social interactions and aims to explore a flourishing knowledge base developed and interpreted through a range of cultural means and practices in the cultural region of Mithila. Obvious intangibility is embedded in the concept and form of these cultural means and practices, nevertheless, the diverse expressions reveal a different kind of perceptibility, which the study has tried to decipher. There are various important aspects of this study.

- Catering to both the theistic and atheistic approaches, philosophy has been developed as an academic discipline in Mithila, including the development of the major school of philosophy (applied logic) Nyaya and Navya Nyaya (the ancient and modern)[1] and contributions to the other major schools of Vaisesika, Samkhya, Mimansa and Vedanta, and important mutual relations with Jainism and Buddhism (Tantra is the direct legacy of the Mahayana doctrine),[2] their traces and subsequent thought process are found and can be discussed with multiple perspectives.

- To briefly mention the Nyaya sutra for reference, the "discipline dealing with the categories of debate over various religious, philosophical, moral, and doctrinal issues (in ancient India)" was called vādavidyā.[3] The structure of debate became formalized over a period from about 500BC to 400AD in Sanskrit writings called the Nyāya Sūtras.[4]…its influence continues today as the new or Navya Nyāya in the fields of philosophy, logic, religion, law, general science, computer science, mathematics, and linguistics…Nyāya means 'right' or 'just,' and generally means "argument." The Sūtras, or "threads" (like the plumb line) provide rhetorical and philosophical guidelines for all aspects of the argumentative process, including discussions on motivation, rules for debate, confutation, fallacies, etc... The framework for describing the rhetorical/debate format is identified in sixteen aspects, beginning with the (four) means of right knowledge (pramāṇa) including

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[1] Bhattacharya, Dineshchandra. 1958. *History of Navya-Nyaya in Mithila*. Chapter 1, Page 1
[2] Thakur, Upendra. 1964. *Studies in Jainism and Buddhism in Mithila*. Varanasi: The Chowkhambha Sanskrit Series Office. Pages 19, 80 and 126
[3] Matilal, Bimal Krishna. 1998. *The Character of Logic in India*. Ed. Jonardon Ganeri and Heeraman Tiwari. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. Page 2
[4] Sinha, Nanda Lal, ed. 1930/1990. *The Nyāya Sūtras of Gotama, by Gautama*. (Trans. Mahamahopadhyaya Satisa Chandra Vidyābhuṣaṇa.) Sacred Books of the Hindus, 8. Allahabad: Basu, 1930. Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990. Page vii

perception (pratyakṣa), inference (anumāna), comparison (upamāna), and "word" (śabda)… the prameya, or "objects of right knowledge"—soul (ātmā), body (śarīra), senses (indriya), objects of the sense (artha), intellect (buddhi), mind (mānas), activity (pravritti) fault (doṣa), rebirth (bhāva), fruit (Phala), pain (duḥkha), and release (apavarga). They reflect Nyāya's fundamental metaphysical grounding… The intellect, or "consciousness" is "a quality of the self" that comes into being when the ātman and the body unite; the mind is an "instrument" of consciousness through which the individual relates to the outer world.[5]… Indian logic is based on the logical principle referred to as GAIE—the "general acceptability of inductive examples," i.e., "all examples brought in support or critique of an empirical generalization should be acceptable to both sides in a philosophical or scientific debate"[6]…(Nyaya) attaches example to observation -

Proposition (pratijñā): The hill (pakṣa) is on fire (sādhya)

Reason (hetu): Because there is smoke (hetu)

Examples (udāharaṇa): Like in a kitchen [Positive example]

Unlike a lake [Negative example]

Application (upanaya): This is the case

Conclusion (nigamāni): The hill is on fire.

(Nyāya method) must be understood within its cultural, historical, philosophical, and soteriological contexts… In post-colonial India, there is some resistance to reifying traditional approaches. Nyāya appears in the ancient Sanskrit language and has mainly been studied within the Brahmanic

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[5] Chakravarthi, Ram-Prasad. 2001. *Saving the Self? Classical Hindu Theories of Consciousness and Contemporary Physicalism*. Philosophy of East and West. 51.3. Pages 378-92

[6] Chakrabarti, Kisor Kumar. 1999. *Classical Indian Philosophy of Mind: The Nyaya Dualist Tradition*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. Page xii

traditions and, as such, is not necessarily familiar to all elements of Indian society… The texts of these disciplines (Nyaya and others) not only make statements about the respective domains of knowledge but also enshrine the empirical wisdom gathered by our society over centuries in these spheres.[7].. Nyāya method offers a rich expansion upon an alternative to Ancient Greek and current Western notions of argument and rhetoric… It invites us to view the world differently. Its approach reminds us of what is important, grounding our arguments in experience, seeking common perspectives, and testing our solutions as to their fruitfulness.[8] This study has specifically focused on the philosophical explorations that the common people of Mithila have been doing for ages and that that may have set the grounds (a separate study needed) for the disciplinary development of philosophical knowledge, with the underlying notion that philosophy is the critical reflection and analysis of the cultural practices in any particular social setting and that provides the direction to the society, as elaborated in this chapter.

- Further in general or particularly in Mithila's context, the cultural institutions, oral tradition, and artistic means are gradually becoming irrelevant, not only because of their generally under-conceived applicability but also their inadequate capacity for wide impartation and decentralization.

- The rituals are widely practiced in the region, however, a process of re-visiting, re-interpreting, re-conceptualising, and reforming the norms in the light of changing social-political scenarios can be seen. The migrated

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[7] Kapoor, Kapil. 2001. *Eleven Objections to Sanskrit Literary Theory: A Rejoinder*. Infinity Foundation. Page 2

[8] Lloyd, Keith. (2007) *A Rhetorical Tradition Lost in Translation: Implications for Rhetoric in the Ancient Indian Nyāya Sūtras*. Advances in the History of Rhetoric, 10:1, Pages 19-42. Accessed 11 November 2019. www.researchgate.net

families now in cities encounter the new versions of cultural life, created in a cross-cultural environment.

- There is a growing thrust of safeguarding and promoting cultural heritage.

- There is a growing worldwide interest in the interdisciplinary study of humanities and their applications. Traditional Knowledge is being studied as an active and fluid community collective with a view that tradition is not static.

- Philosophy is widely considered a methodology for reasoning and determining the solution to the perennial problems of human life. The domain of applied philosophy is quite effective in every walk of life including Education, Development, Culture, Peace and Conflict Resolution, Work ethics, Bioethics, etc.

- The core of this study is the logical and explanatory analysis of both philosophical knowledge (object of knowledge) and the thinking process or philosophising (method of knowledge construction).

The region

Mithila is a cultural region that incorporates the sensibilities of people from North Bihar, adjacent Terai Nepal, and parts of Jharkhand and the Maithil diaspora. The criteria of this demarcation are the common language, Maithili (and related dialects like Bajjika and Angika), as well as the common cultural practices.[9] Mithila is also known as Videh and Tirabhukti (modern Tirhut) which has inspired and has multiple exchanges with the neighbouring regions of Bengal, Orissa, Assam,

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[9] Mishra, Jayakanta. 1949. *A History of Maithili Literature*. Vol. 1 (Early and Middle Periods). Allahabad: Tirabhukti Publications. Pages 9 and 16

Jharkhand and Nepal. Outside Mithila, there is a significant presence of the Maithil diaspora across the world. Consideration of this region in this survey is owing to its history as one of the pioneers of philosophical learning[10] and vibrant philosophical traditions progressed through various traditions and expressed through various cultural practices by the common people, especially women, such as Performing and Visual arts, Oral traditions, Rites and Rituals, Folklores and so many more. There is a logical consistency found in the practices, oriented with logic, reason, or theological arguments; exists in the form of memory, everyday life, text, symbol, etc.; and there has been a support system both patronized and community-supported at large. The survey has focused on existing community expressions and knowledge bases fortifying these traditions.

Not only associated with the philosopher-king ''Janaka Videh (as mentioned in the Ramayana and other scriptures) and stand apart pre-eminently as the land given to intellectual pursuits and consequently to speculations about the spiritual well-being of (hu)man… Mithila was also associated with the leaders of Jainism and Buddhism…(remained part of the republic of Vaishali, Mauryan dynasty, Gupta dynasty and other major eastern dynasties in different eras for a long time), history of Mithila as an independent unit begins in 1097 CE when the adventurers of the South, the Karnatas, ushered in a new era of splendid glory and achievement….Mithila (has) had a long literary tradition. Sanskrit was the main vehicle of expression and the chief source of learning…The process of writing in people's language was started by the Jainas and the Buddhists who took to Prakrit arid Pali respectively… The oldest available work in Maithili is the songs of the Buddhist saints, believed to be composed in Prakrit-Apabhramsa and equally

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[10] Bhattacharya, Dineshchandra. 1958. *History of Navya-Nyaya in Mithila*. Darbhanga: Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning. Chapter 1, Page 1

claimed as their own by the scholars of Bengali. Assamese, Oriya and Hindi… The Buddhist saints and teachers, belonging to the universities of Nalanda (and) Vikramshila, composed these songs in Magadhi-Prakrit, the predecessor of Maithili. The language of the Charya song is generally believed to represent the stage when Maithili had just emerged from the Magadhi-Apabhramsa.''[11] The development of such rooted lingual and artistic expressions has been possible owing to the pursuits of the communities and common people of Mithila. Later the Sanskrit scholars and poets like Vidyapati adopted these expressions and contributed with their explorations. Mithila being the fertile land for the construction of knowledge is a conjugation of different cultures and sensibilities and an inclusive culture going beyond the limitation of any religion, any caste or any ideology. The formation of the concept of Mithila lies in its openness, resilience and acceptance of the plurality which reflects in the varieties of ideologies whether Vedic, Buddhist, Jaina's, Kabir's or those found in the folklores developed by the disadvantaged wings of Maithil society. Mithila is popularly known for its scholars, however, which constitutes only a part of Mithila's intellect, and the vast array of knowledge exists among the common people. This study has explored these domains of knowledge, expressions and the contribution of the common people. In a way, it is the story of the main characters who have always remained untold, unseen and shadowed by a few.

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[11] Chaudhary, Radhakrishna. 2010. *A survey of Maithili Literature*. Delhi: Shruti Publications. Pages 1-3 and 24-25.

Scope of the Study

The topic of study has a wide scope in terms of the characteristics of the tradition; multiple ways of interpretations through the knowledge base and artistic means; the range of literature; and existing social practices. The tradition is developed by the generations of practitioners, continuously active and being enriched in a variety of ways.

- The philosophical foundation of the knowledge base in a cultural setting reflects in the intricacies of its practices. However, it is always renewed, modified, and transformed, in which the predecessors face the threat of extinction whereas the successor gets the challenges of changing social priorities or the ignorance of finding relevance.

- Besides the disciplinary schools of philosophy, other succeeding schools of thought or institutions like Arya Samaj, Kabirpanth and others found in different folklores have their strong presence and influence on the people which is somehow seen in the availability of alternatives and parallel ideologies.

- The multiplicity of interpretations and a critical inquiry process are visible in the oral tradition, literature, arts, and artefacts - Mithila Painting, Sikki sculptures, folk & Vidyapati Music, Sufi & Kabir songs, Dak Vachan, theatre, and so on.

- The socio-cultural and moral pursuits can be seen in the structuring of individual and social life through rites, rituals, genealogy, traditional skills, etc., and can be re-visited.

- The strong presence of collective consciousness in developing these collectives and a community-driven system unfolds other layers including the foremost role of women and the disadvantaged wing of society.

Details of the Chapters

Chapter Two describes the research framework of the study including three broad research questions and the points of Inquiry. It defines the key terms which underlie the central argument, and are inherent in forming the methodology as well as in conceptualizing the framework. It further elaborates the framework of the Study, defines the six concepts of the study, and mentions the tools and methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter Three discusses the concept of Collective Expression through the study of folklore. It unfolds the major sections of the structure of folklore practices and builds the arguments as perspectives on practice discussing the aspects of artistic creations, the consciousness of Identity, the spiritual exploration and discourse and inter-community co-existence. Chapter Four under the title of critical consciousness - the study of theatre arts, deals with the unique journey of Mithila's theatre art and how it has influenced the various aspects of life. The three genres of folk theatre, unified folk/classical theatre, and contemporary theatre are sketched and their respective positions are discussed.

Chapter Five and Chapter Six analyse the concept of the triad of nature, human and divine found in the visual and musical expressions respectively, focusing on the two aspects - the semiotic expression of life as well as the depiction of alaukika (psychic-spiritual dimension). Chapter Seven unfolds the social fabric of Mithila while describing the practices of genealogical records called Panji Prabandh and

finds out the influence of the Panji system on wider society, the extent of its role in framing the entire social fabric as well as the extent of the inter-community inclusion, harmony, and acceptance. Chapter Eight reflects on traditional occupational knowledge to probe the aspect of community co-existence as well as the intricacies of skills and knowledge inherent in these occupations. It also looks into the aspect of the value of work as an equalitarian notion of co-existence. Chapter Nine - Folk wisdom is the study of a common knowledge base that has originated from the shared practices, beliefs, opinions or experiences of commons through a collective construction of knowledge and tested by a trail-n-error process, and developed and internalised as a tradition of folk wisdom. The proverbial wisdom including Dak Vachan of Mithila is discussed. Chapter Ten concludes the study.

Chapter 2

Research Framework

Research Questions

The three broad questions:

- What are the major traditions of philosophical knowledge in Mithila and how they have developed?
- How do these philosophical knowledge traditions inspire various socio-cultural domains of people's lives?
- How philosophy is practiced by the Common People (Commons) through their cultural practices, e.g. Oral traditions, Literature, Artefacts, Painting, Music, Theatre, Rituals, Social system, Traditional Skills and Schools of thought?

[The term 'Commons' used throughout this study denotes the 'common people of Mithila' in a collective manner. The term does not limit the subject - the people, based on any criteria of caste, creed, gender, set of particular skills or intellect, high status or privilege or status. The term refers to those people or the entity who constitute the culture of Mithila.]

Points of Inquiry

- Content and Method of Philosophizing:
  - How knowledge is developed? What are the empirical aspects of that knowledge base in society, the related cultural practices, and their influence on human life?

- Ideas, Beliefs, Thought processes, Meaning-making, and Expressions:
  - How knowledge is concretized and reflected through texts, artefacts, human relations, systems, institutions, etc., and preserved and promoted as social behaviour and heritage, both tangible and intangible?

- The progression- Collective Consciousness in the Practices leading to the formation of Tradition:
  - What are the patterns of genesis including the transformations with time, various similarities and dissimilarities between the practices of any two parallel or subsequent groups of practitioners, and various frames of practice?

- The nuances of Cultural Practice:
  - What are the nature, form, and principles underlying the domain of knowledge and their inter-relation? What is the connection between the philosophical proposition, practice, and practitioner? What are the chronology and context of practice?

The key terms

These key terms, as defined below for the study, underlie the central argument, and are inherent in forming the methodology as well as in conceptualizing the framework. Though these terms are argued in different ways by several scholars, this study has considered the reasoned standpoints.

Philosophy (Philosophical Knowledge)

'Philosophy originated in (hu)man's biological and existential needs to understand, to adjust, and to create… Philosophy cannot be absolutely or purely theoretical for as a world-view or society-view it has a way of altering the beliefs and actions of humans… It is both a creature and creator of culture.'[12] It is the process of knowledge creation, the core of all the knowledge disciplines, and the discipline itself. Philosophy in relation to the construction of knowledge can further be seen at two levels- the object of philosophy, and the method of philosophizing.[13] The methods include the assimilation of ideas, speculations, thought processes, reasoning, questioning, investigation, rationalizations, critical explorations, etc. which are applied to probe into the objects from various domains like Society, System, Spirituality, Aesthetics, Ethics, Knowledge, Nature, Human, Cosmos, etc. Philosophy is further associated with the inter-disciplinary domains or the combined areas of study in the form of disciplines like Psychology, Pedagogy, Culture, Religion, Politics, Sociology, Arts, etc. These disciplines have an advanced system of inquiry and pedagogy. Scientific paradigm coupled with

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[12] Nath, Prem. 1978. *Philosophy and Social Change*. Pandit, Sneh. (Ed.). Perspectives in the Philosophy of Culture. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd. Pages 166-168

[13] *Philosophy of Education – What and Why?* 2014. Interview. Bangalore: Azim Premji University. Accessed 18 October 2020.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=USSSORWUgfU&feature=em-subs_digest

various materialistic, pragmatic, and constructive approaches, has taken the entire course of philosophy to a different level whereas technology has a huge impact on culture. The study focuses on specific knowledge development in the domain of culture, empirical aspects of that knowledge base in society, and its influence on individual/social life in Mithila. The role of philosophy in this regard is to examine the very basis of those conditions which constitute the culture.

Culture and Cultural Practice

''To talk of culture is to talk of all the patterns of human activity which reveal human to self and which bring the human into a relationship with the environment''.[14] Culture can be taken as a human invention, reflects in the 'pattern of living' or 'way of life', constituted by social systems and institutions. There are various views on the concept of culture. Culture can be conceptualised as a System of behaviours or a Set of meanings. Culture can be classified as Subjective culture – the (specific elements like) beliefs, values, and internalised interaction patterns that an individual possess, or as Objective culture that human has created like arts and institutions (based on several other particular or universal elements like synthesis, expression or organization, etc.). Culture can be studied independently of its carriers – the human beings as well as a human construct, however, culture can be construed in many ways depending on the studier or the interpreter, as well as currently predominant trends or social factors. 'Culture could be viewed as an amalgamation of potentially related and relatively durable societal characteristics that describe an identifiable human population.'[15] The systematic organisation of

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[14] Pandit, Sneh. (Ed). 1978. *Perspectives in the Philosophy of Culture*. Introduction. Page xiii
[15] Minkov, Michael. (2012). *Cross Cultural Analysis*. Sage Publication Inc. Pages 13-17

the individuals is called Society, the aspects of which lie in the intervening spaces between the individuals. The creative and appreciative purposes constitute the central theme of the individuals and culture is the function of creativity and appreciation.[16] Culture may be seen as positioned in a particular time-frame or as imbibing the various time-frames in which a society develops. Thus, the culture needs context. For this study, the aspects of culture in the form of thoughts, words, and actions prominently governed by the knowledge tradition, will be discussed. The culture is practiced through the ideas, beliefs, thought processes, values, expressions, etc., concretized and reflected through texts, artefacts, human relations, systems, institutions, etc., or the behavioural pattern socially acquired and transmitted by means of symbols, and preserved as heritage. The focus is to study some of these practices and patterns.

Philosophy and Culture

Philosophy is a critical self-analysis of a particular culture. ''Philosophy begins when individuals begin to critically distance themselves from their culture to question and confront established beliefs, customs, practices and institutions of their society…Philosophy is the means by which every culture provides itself with justification for its values, beliefs and worldview and also serves as a catalyst for progress…It is not only that culture that influences philosophy but…philosophy needs culture in order to be expressed. In this symbiotic relation, culture needs philosophy for clarification and philosophy needs culture as its material for

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[16] Sinha, A. K. 1978. *Theoretical Foundation of Culture*. Pandit, Sneh. (Ed.). Perspectives in the Philosophy of Culture. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd. Pages 5- 6 and 9.

reflections.''[17] Philosophy is an integral part of a culture which needs philosophy to revisit it and aid to shape it. ''Philosophy can play both a positive and a negative role in culture. From a positive standpoint… (it) may help people to critically examine a culture – what a culture takes for granted, what unifies a culture, and even whether culture or a way of life is worth preserving. Philosophy may also reinforce culture by providing rational arguments in support of a particular cultural practice…On the other hand, philosophy may challenge culture by challenging its values or traditions, or calling into question its claims to legitimacy, or casting doubt on such normative principles within the culture as 'truth', 'objectivity', the 'good', etc. or by advocating the values and norms of other cultures. Philosophy could also show what is common (or universal) in different cultures and also serve as a guide to intercultural dialogue.''[18] This study by analyzing the cultural practices and related narratives widespread in Mithila has taken a mixed approach inquiring into the ideas and perceptions of the way of life as well as investigating the established values, beliefs and norms. It will try to unfold the layers of particular practices, bringing forth the hidden, untold and unrecognized merit of those practices. In this study, Philosophy is taken into the public domain exploring philosophical thirst and inquiries found among Commons' practices.

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[17] Takov, Peter. & Tosam, Mbih J. (Ed.). 2016. *The Role of Philosophy in Culture*. Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG. Page 6-7

[18] Takov, Peter. & Tosam, Mbih J. (Ed.). 2016. *The Role of Philosophy in Culture*. Page 1-4

Tradition

An inherited pattern of thought, belief, or action and the related practice of long-standing with a collective consciousness. This study considers the tradition of the practices by the people living in a common time-zone and geography, intermingled with other cultures frequently, and influenced by the inward or outward fluctuations. In the tradition of philosophical knowledge, both objects and methods refer to the elements of their creation, the stages of development, continuity, assimilation into the society, or resilience to new inclusions. The study also concentrates on whether the essence of practice has been uniform or assimilating or transformative, and if so, what are the degree and extent.

Survey Research

The methodology is decided considering the nature of the study, the quantum of data, and the broadness of the universe which require a huge number of inputs to be collected, collated, and triangulated to achieve the proposed outcome. As mentioned, considering the scope and the range of such inquiry and potential areas of study, this research requires to use the methods of a survey focusing on the qualitative aspect. The prime approach to this inquiry is to include and go beyond popular narratives to make them comprehensive. Though the study is philosophical in nature, the focus is on the empirical aspects of the subject to explore practical grounds.

Framework of Study

The two major components of this discussion, philosophy, and culture have complementing and progressive inter-linkages. Culture is the creation for which philosophy provides the basis and insights whereas cultural practices form, enrich and improve philosophical knowledge. Cultural practices are the manifestation of the culture in which different philosophical ideas, as well as principles, are inherent and both complement each other. They are integral parts of the whole and have various modes and types. The study has taken a conceptual framework based on the interrelation between the ideas, concepts, principles, perspectives, and practices in a particular cultural setting. All of them are different forms of knowledge. The interrelation is cyclic in nature, ideas emerge from the practices, developed, and inform further practices. The practices go through the process of conceptualisation, rationalisation and standardisation, done by the practitioners in correspondence with the existing and relevant body of knowledge. Nevertheless, the entire process is fluid and overlapping in its practicalities. The ideas are considered as the contents of cognition which may be based on intuition, perception, assumption, pre-conceived notion, experience, or their combination[19] as well as the outcome of the cognition. The ideas lead to the exploration or practice by which ideas are concretized, contextualized and finally conceptualized.
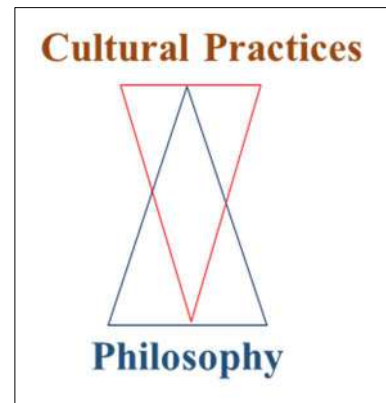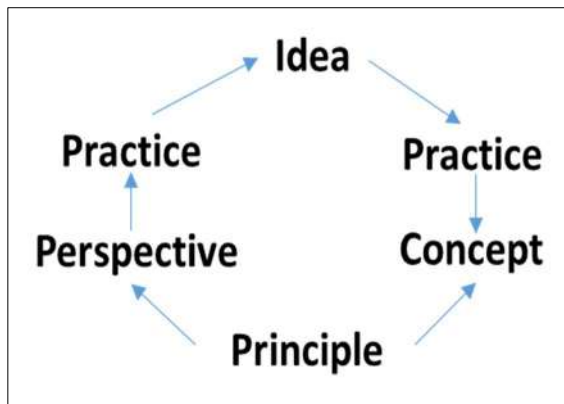
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[19] Ray, Michael. *Idea*. Accessed 01 April 2022. www.britannica.com

The term 'Concept' is widely discussed across the disciplines, generally taken as the ''constituent of thoughts or propositions as discussed in linguistics or as their mental representations as proposed in cognitive science or as the logical constitutions or defining conditions for the target of analysis or an account of categorization in philosophy.''[20] Concepts are ''objective entities or constructions out of objective entities''[21], and can be the ''complex entities that are composed of other concepts or more basic representational components''[22]. ''Our thoughts, especially those that express or involve propositions, are analyzed and distinguished from one another by appeal to various facts involving concepts and our grasp of them. Similarly, our linguistic utterances that express propositions also express concepts, since concepts are normally thought to be closely related to, or even identified with, the meanings of entities like predicates, adjectives, and the like. Our understanding and interaction with the world also involve concepts and our grasp of them. Our understanding that a given thing is a member of a given category is at least partly in virtue of our grasp of concepts, and so are our acts of categorizing…(different theoretical stands consider) concept as universal… (and) takes concepts to be structured representations…hence as constituents of propositions, and concepts are individuated in virtue of the roles they play in a "mental theory" an agent has with respect to something or category of thing.''[23] In this study, the concepts are taken as objective, universal and logical entities which serve as the defining condition for the target of analysis - the cultural practice inquired and reasoned while unfolding the layers of its composition.

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20 Earl, Dennis. *Concepts*. Accessed 8 April 2019. www.iep.utm.edu.
21 Ganeri, Jonardon. *Navya-Nyaya: Analytical Philosophy in Early Modern India*. Accessed 8 April 2019. www.columbia.edu
22 Margolis, Eric. 2019. *Concepts*. Accessed 8 April 2019. www.plato.stanford.edu
23 Earl, Dennis. *Concepts*. Accessed 8 April 2019

The principles are the standardized version of the conceptual understanding accepted as the truth of the time and applied as the basis of the positions or perspectives for further reasoning and practices. In this study, various ideas of philosophical nature such as metaphysical, semiotic, aesthetic, epistemic, social, ethical and so on, found throughout these cultural practices are analyzed based on the philosophical principles generally conceived, formulated and institutionalized as the formal body of philosophical knowledge by the scholars, philosophers or society as a whole, some of the principles referred to in the study are related to spirituality and faith, symbols and depiction, beauty and pleasure, knowledge and methodology, system and positioning as well as norms. There are various contesting notions regarding these principles, especially at ethical, social, metaphysical or epistemic levels, the study has tried to analyze them and applied that learning to conceptualize and framed its arguments. The philosophical concepts are considered, which are derived from philosophical ideas and developed through the practices in the cultural setting. Thus, to investigate a cultural practice or an underlying principle, it needs to unfold the layers of its composition. In this study,

- The unfolding of those integrative layers is done through the philosophical exploration of some particular concepts prominently reflect throughout the cultural practices.
- These concepts have served as the hypothetical ground for this investigation.
- These concepts are derived by looking at cultural practices from philosophical perspectives.
- These concepts mediate between philosophical ideas and principles, and cultural practices.

- The random selection of the cultural practices is based on their range, scale, and depth of practice as well as the elements of collectivity.

- The methods of data collection and analysis include the discussion on the concept and based on which the particular cultural practice has been broadly sketched as 'Structure of the Practice' i. e. an elaborated introduction, range of practice and details of various aspects, followed by the discussion centred on the intricacies of the practice as 'Perspective on the Practice'.

- The focus is on the empirical inquiry into the subject as well as including and going beyond the interpretations of the practices, found in popular narratives.

[Image: Framework of Study]

The below image illustrates the framework of the study graphically. A lotus leaf in the background symbolizes a whole human-social-natural setting in which various practices are done, discoveries made, knowledge constructed, human life shaped in accordance with the universe as well as societies formed and culture developed. The semi-circular shape of the lotus leaf gives the impression of the rising sun which is the root of all the creations on earth. The lotus leaf originates from the branch of the lotus, receives the vital elements (water and minerals) from the plant and by absorbing other vital elements (air and sun) and giving them to the plant serves as the food factory or its stomata as the power-house of the plant. That phenomenon represents the relationship between philosophy and culture, both of them are parts of a whole in which culture shapes the way of life and philosophy shapes the thrust of life.
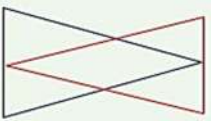
Framework of Study

Cultural Practices

P E R S P E C T I V E S
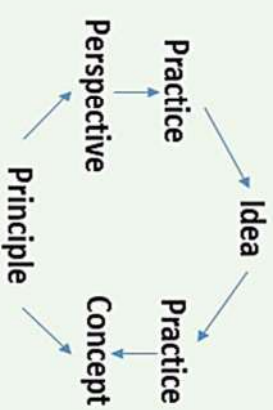
C O N C E P T S

Folklore
Collective Expression

Traditional
Occupational
Skills
Community
Co-existence

Epistemic
(Knowledge, Methodology)

Social Fabric

Social
(System, Positioning)

Social
Structure
(Genealogical
bases)

Ethical
(Norms)

Ideas and Principles

Philosophy

Aesthetic
(Beauty, Pleasure)

Semiotic
(Symbols, Depiction)

Metaphysical
(Spirituality, Faith)

Folk
Wisdom

Critical
Consciousness

Triad -Nature,
Human & Divine

Dak Vachan

Theatre Arts

Musical
Expression

Visual
Expression

Cultural Practices

Philosophy

Practice → Idea
Perspective
Principle
Perspective → Practice → Concept

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Concepts

The study has considered six concepts including Collective Expression, Critical Consciousness, Triad of Nature, Human and Divine, Social Fabric, Community Co-existence, and Folk Wisdom through which seven different cultural practices Folklore, Theatre Arts, Musical Expression, Visual Expression, Genealogical Records (Panji Prabandh), Traditional Occupational Skills, and Dak Vachan have been discussed respectively. The concepts will be the core of the discussion on the cultural practices of traditional philosophical knowledge. The metaphysical (spirituality and faith), aesthetic (beauty and pleasure), and social (system and positioning of individual/community) elements are overarching all the practices. The concepts are briefly elaborated on and exemplified below; the detailed discussions will be done in the relevant sections further.

Collective Expression

"Folk" can refer to "any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is- it could be a common occupation, language, or religion but what is important is that a group which has some traditions that it calls its own".[24] The folklore studies include diverse subject matter, continuity as well as the inter-relation between literate as well as illiterate society, between the oral and the written, printed or recorded, individual and community creation, etc. The important aspects are the group or a particular community, context, and collectivity in notions, experiences, beliefs, and creative expressions. Folk represents the people who form the community based on their

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[24] Dundes, Alan. 1965. *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall. Page 2

collectivity, and folklore becomes the account of that collectivity, which is expressed through various cultural and creative means. Mithila is a conjugation of diverse communities and their respective sensibilities of which Folklore is an important account of the communities' collective expression. Under this big umbrella of folklore, various explorations at metaphysical, aesthetic, moral, and social levels are visible. This study delves into the artistic expressions of the folklores of Mithila including Salhesh and Deena-Bhadri to discuss the aspects of artistic and aesthetic creations, intra/inter-community co-existence and collective identity. Some of these artistic expressions are practiced for ages[25], redefined at times[26] and have seen many changes in their concept, execution[27] and expressions[28] corresponding to the truth of time[29], to portray the consciousness of collective identity and the response to inequality and discrimination.[30] Another discourse is found in the religious framework i.e. whether to search for a parallel system against the religious hegemony or the dialogue with the mainstream system for social co-existence and against religious monopoly.[31] Folklores represent the belief, notions, history and overall life through the language given by the arts and form a knowledge tradition, that evolved and developed on the periphery of alleged civilized society.

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[25] Kavishekaracharya, Jyotirisvara. 1344. *Varnaratnakara*. (Ed. Chatterjee, Suniti Kumar and Mishra, Babua, 1940). Calcutta: The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. Page ix.

[26] Imam, Hasan. 2018. *Daliton ke Pratirodh ki Abhiwyakti hain Salhes*. Accessed 5 October 2020. www.sahapedia.org

[27] Kumar, Sunil. 2018. *Lokala aur Sahitya ke Aaine men Salhes*. Accessed 18 October 2020. www.sahapedia.org

[28] *King Salhes Nach*. 2020. Observation and Participation as Performance designer. Produced by Nari Ugdar Sanstha. Performance on 5 February 2020 at Bharat Rang Mahotsav 2020, Delhi. Accessed 18 October 2020. www.21brm.nsd.gov.in

[29] Malangia, Mahendra. 2009. *Maithili Loknatyak Vistrit Adhyayan evam Vishleshan*. Delhi: Maithili Lokrang. Page 36

[30] Ahmad, Imtiyaz. 2009. *Dalit Lokgathaon men Pratirodh*. Delhi: Jos Kalapura. Page 19.

[31] Deewana, Ram Shreshtha. 2017. *Folklore Raja Salhesh: In literature's perspective*. Interview. ANN India. Accessed 11 October 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2vss1KetRE

Critical Consciousness

Theatre Art is one of the most creative artistic expressions of our society. It has given platforms for the depiction of multiple perspectives of individuals and the community at large. It provides a strong medium of artistic expression and human identity. ''It contains various integral elements of Performance, Pedagogy, and Discourse. A performance consists of both, the development of a work of art (process) and presenting it to the audience as a completion of the developing process (a product), nevertheless, the process keeps on going adding more values based on the experience of the presentation, the reflection of the audience, or new perceptions, etc. That makes the audience an integral element of the performance in addition to the playwright, director, and artists (including technicians).''[32] Theatre as a Pedagogy is widely applied, primarily in the domain of Education with the focus on ''the aspects of creativity, well-being, constructive and dialectic approaches, etc.''[33] Theatre is also being explored as therapy. The element of Discourse is applied through a critical inquiry process during various community dialogues and developmental activities. In this regard, theatre of the oppressed is one of the most effective techniques developed by Augusto Boal who applied various ideas taken from folk/Indigenous theatre and traditional games across the world[34] to build his action-oriented, discursive theatre pedagogy inspired by Paul Freire's theory of 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'. Freire applied his ideas in education both for the reproduction of knowledge and transformation of the knower through the process of 'Conscientizacao' which refers to learning to

[32] Narayan, Abhishek Dev. 2018. *The Directorial perspective: Mahendra Malangia's Play-writing Process*. Maithili Lokmanch. New Delhi: Malangia Foundation. Jan-Mar 2018/1, Page 14.

[33] Narayan, Abhishek Dev. 16 June 2020. *Theatre-in-Education*. Webinar. Accessed 10 October, 2020. www.facebook.com/watch/?v=252493142707837

[34] Boal, Augusto. 2002. *Games for Actors and Non-actors*. (Translated by Jackson, Adrian). London and New York: Routledge. Pages 8 and 30.

perceive social, political and economic contradictions, to break the 'culture of silence' and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.[35] The pedagogy he devised facilitates the learners' critical understanding and reconstruction of consciousness. Augusto Boal says, ''At its simplest, the idea underlying this is that 'a picture paints a thousand words', that images can be closer to our true feelings, even our subconscious feelings.'' All the creative processes depict parts of us. Boal further says about art as ''a core of the creative process and that 'art is immanent to all men (human).''[36] ''The idea that we are born 'knowing' art explains how creative processes enable us to make images which reflect, communicate and at times weave our disparate views of the world into something universal.''[37] The creative-critical approaches open up both inward and outward space for self-discovery, and positioning in life as well as a method for critical consciousness and learning. Every culture has a particular theatre form or theatrical ways of expression and that is indebted to the tradition of artistic expression that flourished in the ages. Mithila's theatre art has its unique journey and it has influenced the various aspects of life. The concept of critical consciousness is reflected in the characterisation of the aspects of life, the discussion, and the mode of expression. Besides devising the artistic expressions clubbed with various aesthetic values, these practices continuously open up various debates around human/social values, social issues and social justice.

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[35] Freire, Paul. 2005. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York/London: Continuum. Preface
[36] Boal, Augusto. 2002. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. Page xx
[37] Morgan, Patricia. *The Potential of Creative Arts as a Medium for Mental Health Promotion in Schools*. Accessed 26 November, 2020

Triad of Nature, Human and Divine

A discussion around the creation of the universe, the supreme creator, and the creator-creation relationship is widespread in every culture. It goes further to understanding the interconnectedness between oneself and the ultimate self. The dimensions of the universe – 'the psychic-spiritual dimension as well as a physical-material dimension…humans have also described the interplay between the spiritual and material aspects of the universe including the presence of the divine within the physical world… a spirituality experiences itself as supported by both the spiritual and the physical dynamics of the cosmic-earth processes, and brings the human, the other-than-human and the Divine into a communion that permits us to discover ourselves in the universe just as the universe discovers itself in us'.[38] The communion – triad of nature, human and divine is found in the visual and musical traditions in Mithila. Here, 'nature' refers to the entities/objects other-than-human whereas 'divine' refers to the imperceptible supreme force. Though these traditions have a huge repertoire of work, the study has focused on those expressions which portray the interconnection between nature, human and the divine, through various processes of encoding, decoding, and the creation of symbols. For example- in Tantrik painting, the artistic depiction in painting (Chitra) decodes the lingual depiction (Beej Mantra and Mantroddhar) of the knowledge devised by the visionary (*Drushta*) in line with the geometrical interpretation (Yantra and Yantroddhar). Similarly, Aripan, Kohbar, and Sikki sculptures are also made through decoding the attributes of nature and the divine and their relationship with humans and expressed as works of art. Similarly, various forms of folk and traditional music have a line of thought and expression

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[38] O'Hara, Dennis Patrick. 2015. *Thomas Berry's Understanding of the Psychic- Spiritual Dimension of Creation: Some sources*. To Live in a Cosmos: The Intellectual Roots of Thomas Berry. Accessed 24 March 2021. www.researchgate.net

based on the triad. Both in visual and musical expressions, the human emotions, thoughts, social living and the psychic-spiritual exploration of the divine are illustrated through the symbols derived from nature - its elements, attributes, objects and phenomena. These constituents of nature embody various aspects of human life and represent that through nature's language.

Social Fabric

Similar to a piece of fabric woven by using different arrangements of warp and weft of various types of yarn, society is constituted by different units of individuals, families, and communities. The fabric of society is woven or structured and organized by processes and norms. The social system and positioning of the units of society are part of that social fabric. The integrity of society can be metaphorically depicted as the compactness of the fabric called 'Gups' in Maithili which depends on how evenly or impartially the units of society are cohered. In Mithila, the underlying social structure is influenced by a number of factors, one of them being the genealogical basis practiced as the system of genealogical records called Panji Prabandh in Mithila. Though these records refer to the lineage and are primarily used for arranging the marital relationship between the families of particular communities, it has wider implications on society including the practice of the concept of purity of blood, high-born status and related social stratification. In this section of the study, the influence of the Panji system on wider society, the extent of its role in framing the entire social fabric as well as the extent of inter-community inclusion, harmony, and acceptance, have been analysed.

Community Co-existence

'I am because you are!', the philosophy of 'ubuntu' from Africa is a concept that the self of persons is shaped by their relationships with others. In African ideology, it consists of ''the virtues to which a person in these societies is expected to aspire – such as compassion, generosity, honesty, magnanimity, empathy, understanding, forgiveness and the ability to share.''[39] It talks about a way of living that initiate the core value of 'I am' because 'you are'. It can go beyond the relationship between humans to the relationship between humans and every other aspect of nature as well, that is more of a symbiotic relationship, interdependence, mutuality and reciprocity. All the units of nature are entwined and so do the humans whether in their natural life or their social life. The social nature of humans has this underlying notion of 'I exist because others exist' and that facilitates the value of co-existence. The concept of co-existence consists of the vital elements required for the functioning of society, in which every individual has a role. Traditional occupational knowledge is one such aspect of the co-existence which has been required to fulfil the necessities ranging from food, cloth and house to health and healing to survive and thrive and the knowledge and spirituality to fulfil the quest of life. ''In other words, a human being achieves humanity through his or her relations with other human beings. But this understanding does not need to generate an oppressive structure, where the individual loses his or her autonomy in an attempt to maintain a relationship with 'other'.''[40] This study will discuss some of the traditional occupational knowledge in order to probe the aspect of co-existence as well as the intricacies of skills and knowledge inherent in these

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[39] Eze, Michael Onyebuchi. *I am because you are*. Accessed 25 April 2022, from www.en.unesco.org

[40] Eze, Michael Onyebuchi. *I am because you are*. Accessed 25 April 2022

occupations. It will also look into the aspect of the value of work as an equalitarian notion of co-existence.

Folk Wisdom

A common knowledge base that originates from the shared practices, beliefs, opinions or experience of Commons through a collective construction of knowledge and tested by a trail-n-error process is developed and internalised as a tradition of folk wisdom. Collective wisdom facilitates the ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding or common sense and insights discovered, observed, experimented with, applied, and lived by the generations of the Commons. Such tradition is found in almost every culture all across India and the world, particularly among the agrarian societies, especially as most of these proverbs are found to be related to agrarian life, weather, rain, farming activities, etc. Dak Vachan and other proverbs as a collective construction of knowledge applied as a common knowledge base are found as folk wisdom in Mithila. Found in the form of proverbs related to every walk of the Commons' life and shared wisdom, these are different episodes of everyday life, married life, farming, travel, weather, astrology (Varshphal), etc. These proverbs talking about the pattern of social and natural life and its impact on Commons, are frequently quoted and still followed by many. Besides the modes of living, thoughts, intellectual and social status, surroundings, and other elements making up social life, the aspects of history, sociology, and philosophy are delineated. In this study, some of the proverbs are elaborated which depict the aspects of life metaphorically as well as other proverbs which talk about human and animal psychology. The study has

focused on the construction of knowledge while discussing the collective nature of these proverbs as shared folk wisdom.

Data Collection and analysis

The data has been collected using a set of tools, as mentioned below. The available data has been collated and analysed, as described previously, based on the discussion on the concept and based on which the particular cultural practice has been broadly sketched as 'Structure of the Practice' i. e. an elaborated introduction, range of practice and details of various aspects, followed by the discussion centred on the intricacies of the practice as 'Perspective on the Practice'.

Tools of Data collection

Tools	Output
Interview – face-to-face interaction, online, telephonic	Questionnaire, Written notes, Images, Videos, Audio
Observation of practices (artistic, ritualistic, and institutional)	Written notes, Images, Videos
Participation, Facilitation, and Contribution in Theatre Performances and Workshops	Written notes, Images, Videos
Study of Physical artefacts like paintings, sculptures, etc.	Written notes, Images
Visits to related community places	Written notes, Images, Videos
Secondary Literature: Books, Articles, Archival records, Websites, and Online Journal	Copy of book/article – soft/hard copies, Written notes
Participation in Seminar, Conference	Written notes, Videos, Images, Documents, Copies of paper

Chapter 3

Collective Expression (Folklore)

In the folklore study, debates around the aspects of 'antiquity' versus 'contemporariness', 'folk' versus 'classical' or 'illiterate' versus 'literate' have been prominent. However, folklorists focus on the study of human creativity within specific cultural and social contexts, including how such creative expressions are linked to political, religious, ethnic, regional, and other forms of group identity. "Folk" can refer to "any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is- it could be a common occupation, language, or religion but what is important is that a group which has some traditions that it calls its own".[41] The folklore studies include diverse subject matter, continuity as well as the inter-relation between literate as well as illiterate society, between the oral and the written, printed or recorded, individual and community creation, etc. The important aspects are the group or a particular community, context, and collectivity in notions, experiences, beliefs, and creative expressions. Folk represents the people who form the community based on their collectivity, and folklore becomes the account of that collectivity, which is depicted through various cultural and creative means. The cultural region of Mithila is a conjugation of diverse communities and their respective sensibilities. The structure of Maithil society has various social, political, genealogical, and other bases similar to that of other parts of India, however different in mode and scale. These bases also distinguish one community from the other with the

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[41] Dundes, Alan. 1965. *The Study of Folklore*. Page 2. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall. Page 2

predominant identifying factors of caste and underlying notions of traditional occupation, origin, etc. In this study, the terms community and caste are used interchangeably.

Largely, the folklores in Mithila are named after the local deities or heroes – both male and female representing the particular communities, for example- Salhes for the Dusadh community or Deena-Bhadri for the Mushar community or Karikh Maharaj for Yadav or Hansraj-Vansraj for the Rajput community. The local deities can be distributed in four different types- the Family deity, Community deity, Village deity, and Vedic/Hindu/Tantric gods/goddesses. The followers of Islam called Muslims in general, though have religious uniformity, are also divided into similar types of communities and have a profession-based identity as well, for example – Kujra who grows vegetables or Laheria who makes bangles, Dhunia, etc. Some of those communities also believe in certain deities. Almost every family has a particular deity (Kul Devi/Devta- local/ Vedic/Hindu/Tantric) like Kalibandi Goraiya, Shokha Shambhunath, Gahil Maharaj, Karikh Maharaj etc. Many families in a particular community frequently have a similar family deity or sometimes similar to the ones from other communities (Karikh, Narsingh, Kalibandi Goraiya, etc.) as well. The community deity belongs to a particular community, nevertheless, other communities also participate in the rituals related to that deity or the performances of the folklore. Salhes is one of the popular deities across the communities. Some of the folklores have references of their respective heroes aligned with others. A common major feature in the rituals of all of these deities is the inaugural worship of 'Chaudah Debaan' (fourteen deities) which include all the prominent deities of different communities (upper/lower castes) including Meer Sultan/ Meera sahib, a deity connected with the Muslim community.

The village deities are characterized as Brahm Devta (male) and Matr Brahm (female), revered or worshipped by every villager. The Brahm Devta Sthan (place) is mostly the oldest tree (Peepal or Banyan) in the village which symbolizes the guardian of the village and is sometimes named after the legendary person (Ramji Babu, Koyla Baba) of that village. Besides, the lump of rice, flowers, etc., the clay horse is used as an offering to the male deity. The female deity, Matr Brahm is worshipped in the form of Pind (a round and solid object made of rice/soil that symbolises the universe). The concept of Brahm Devta is derived from Vedic beliefs.[42] Also, there are many references to Hindu/Muslim/Sufi saints and their shrines revered by everybody as guardians.

Brahm Sthan, Jhanjharpur (source: Abhishek Dev Narayan)

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[42] Kumari, Pushpa. 2017. *Mithila Lok Sanskriti ke Vividh Aayam*. International Journal of Applied Research. 2017, 3 (10). Page 360

The prevalent Vedic/Hindu religious beliefs and gods/goddesses belong to three major categories of Shaiva (follower of Shiva – the source of Mukti or salvation), Shakta (follower of Shakti – the source of Siddhi or divine power), and one minor category of Vaishnav (follower of Vishnu).[43] The ancient tantric beliefs have been the basis of the agro-based lifestyle comprising cultivation and fertility rites, with different sections of Yoginis, Mahakalis, Kula Kundalini, Ardhanarishwar, etc.[44] Goddesses like Chhinnamastika, and Sheetla (worshipped to cure disease) are the prominent deities. Hundreds of different folklores[45] are practiced in various communities in the form of rituals, songs, stories, theatre, painting, sculpture, etc. Traditionally found in oral form, these folklores and various practices have been documented in different textual or audio-visual forms recently, however, some of them are still transmitted orally.

The major works of documentation, survey research, and analytical books on the folklore include, An Introduction to the Maithili Language of North Bihar containing Grammar, Chrestomathy, and Vocabulary (George Abraham Grierson. 1881), Jyotireshwar's Varnaratnakar, 1344 (Varna-Ratnakara. Edited by Chatterjee, Suniti Kumar, and Mishra, Babua. 1940), A History of Maithili Literature (Jayakanta Mishra, 1949) the novels by Manipadm (Raja Salhes, 1973 and Anang Kusma, 1999), Karikh Lok Gatha (Mahendra Narayan Ram, 2002) Maithili Lok Sahitya: Svarup O' Saundarya (Ramdeo Jha, 2002), Maithili Lokgatha: Swarup, Vivechan evam Prastuti (Ed. Mahendra Narayan Ram, 2007), Maithili Loknatyak Vistrit Adhyayan evam Vishleshan (Mahendra Malangia,

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[43] Mishra. Jayakanta. 1949. *A History of Maithili Literature*. Allahabad: Tirabhukti Publishers. Page 21.

[44] Malhotra, Anita Ghei. 2007. *Critical Interconnections: Maithili and Tantric Art from Northern India*. New York: Columbia University. Page 19.

[45] Yadav, Yaduvir. 5 October 2020. *Mithilak Lokgatha: Anushthan evam Prastuti*. Interview. Accessed 11 October 2020. www.youtube.com/channel/UCq5iWGHncVPLw8AG8wRjIKw

2009), A survey of Maithili Literature. (Radhakrishna Chaudhary. 2010), Lokgatha: Parivartan Ki Sanskritik Abhivayakti (Hasan Imam, 2014), Shabdak Jangal Men Arthak Khoj (Commentary on Varnaratnakar by Mahendra Malangia, 2015), and so on. These important works along with other related ones are frequently referred to in this study.

Structure of the Practice

The practice of folklore can be distributed in three major sections - Lore (references –story etc.), Ritual (Gahwar –Shrine, and Worship), and Portrayal of the lore through four types of artistic representations - Mahrai (Singing/ballad), Nach (Theatre), Chitrakala/Bhittichitra (Painting/Mural), and Murtikala (Sculpture).

Besides ancient mythological references, some of these ancient practices, especially the singing and drama forms are prominently mentioned in the 14th-century cyclopaedia Varnaratnakar. The idol-making and painting on paper (since the 1970s) are relatively recent whereas murals have been made for a long time. Gahwar (the ancient idea of a cave) was started being converted into a temple (shrine) in the decades of the 1980s following the Dalit movements across the country.[46] These practices are now at different phases of development or downfall, however still quite prevalent.

Lore

The verbal (and other) references largely developed, preserved and practiced as an oral tradition, are the stories around the deities, their life events, their deeds, and their journey as leaders of the related communities. The historicity of these deities is difficult to establish, however, on the basis of available literature, scholars link the rise of community heroes with a different era, during the political disturbance after the reign of King Harshwardhan[47] or the age of foreign invasion in the 11th century onwards including by the Turk invaders who replaced the Karnat king of Mithila Harsinghdeva in the late 14th century and established their provinces in Mithila. The popular beliefs regarding their historicity either deny the need to position the folk tradition in history assuming the tradition as a free flow of human creation or believe its existence since time immemorial. The 14th-century cyclopaedia 'Varnaratnakar' does mention the performances of some of these

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[46] Imam, Hasan. 2018. *Daliton ke Pratirodh ki Abhiwyakti hain Salhes*. Webpage. Accessed 5 October 2020. www.sahapedia.org
[47] Malangia, Mahendra. 2009. *Maithili Loknatyak Vistrit Adhyayan Evam Vishleshan*. Page 45.

folklores, although many pages of the original palm-leaf manuscript were destroyed.[48] These folklore traditions are age-old and various places like Morang, Pakadia, etc. referred to in the stories do exist in the present time. These references of the places are believed to be the same places where those heroes lived or were related to. These references may also be the efforts of creators/artists to contextualize and localize their works/performances. A similar effort can frequently be seen during the performances with an aim to create familiarity for the audience. That has also reinforced the mixing of various fictional accounts of the heroes/everyday life events of the people with the stories.

Salhes by Lala Pandit, Darbhanga
(source: www.sahapedia.com)

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[48] Kavishekaracharya, Jyotirisvara. 1344. *Varnaratnakara*. (Ed. Chatterjee, Suniti Kumar and Mishra, Babua, 1940). Calcutta: The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. Page ix.

These stories more or less follow the same pattern. The characters, no matter what they are in the story whether a king or a brave person, most of them also do the same work as their respective community does, for example – in the folklore Raja Salhes, the protagonist Salhes is the king of the state of Mahisautha but at one point becomes the guard of the palace of king Kuleshwar of Pakaria, similarly, the antagonist Chuharmal, a prominent person of Mokama works as a guard at the same palace of Mahisautha. Chuharmal, the legend from the same community has a different story as the protagonist in the drama 'Reshma-Chuharmal' in which his beloved Reshma is the daughter of a landlord (Bhumihar), the powerful community dominant in the northern fertile plain of the Ganges. These two characters of Salhes and Chuharmal are the bravest and strongest in a certain part of the story, but work as guards and are blamed for theft in another part of the story. The Dusadh community they belong to has had farm labour and 'guarding' as traditional occupations and they were also considered a thief and spy community. British anthropologist William Crook termed them bandits in 1893.[49] In the story, stealing is justified and considered a tactic, even goddess Ganga helps Chuharmal steal in the palace of Mahisautha as part of the story of Salhesh.

Similarly in the lore of Deenaram-Bhadri, the heroes Deena and Bhadri (two brothers) of the Mushar community work on the farm, similar to the traditional occupation of the community in the state of Jogianagar. The Mushars are generally considered the expert ploughers having sound farming skills. The community who is largely landless and extremely underprivileged plays the most important part in the agro-based economy and thus the core of the life of Mithila and other parts of the region. The story of Deena-Bhadri is the account of their personal-social life

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[49] *Festival of Salhes*. 2018. Feature. Accessed 11 October 2020.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXUbZHD1fv4

and their fight against the feudal lords Jorabar Singh as well as King Kanak Singh and her sister Bachia, for the rights of the people. According to the legend, they also fight for the access to Jagannathpuri temple of Orissa and even help the Brahman priest and save the sanctity of the Sinheshwar temple of Mithila. Their story also connects with Makka and Madina.[50] The basic structure of the story in folklore is the life of the heroes lived as common people, their work, love, struggle, and dedication to get justice. The struggle makes them heroes and that is why the community worships them as icons. Their struggle and transformation as a deity have had different notions and implications for the community discussed further in this document.

Ritual

The ritualistic aspect of folklore consists of the everyday worship in Gahwar (shrine), the annual festive celebration in the months of May (Deena-Bhadri) and August-September (Salhesh), and the Baithki (special worship) by the Bhagat (priest) organised for individual household or families. The priest is of the same community and is a male and sometimes female as well, unlike the traditional male Brahman priest in the Hindu temple. There are many shrines of these deities all across Mithila. The ritual is an invocation to the deity who is the protector guardian and wish granter. The Bhagat becomes the carrier or medium to connect with the divine.

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[50] *Lokgatha Deena-Bhadri Ka Kathanak*. Accessed 13 December 2021. www.folkartopedia.com.

Bhagait (source: Yaduvir Yadav)

Figure 4: Salhes Gahwar, Chunabhatti, Darbhanga
(source: www.sahapedia.org)

Figure 5: Deena-Bhadri Gahwar (source:
www.folkartopedia.com)

The rituals for different deities of various communities are more or less similar, however different in time-period, offering, and some processes. Salhes festival is quite popular. During the festival, the clay idols of the deity made by Kumhar (potter) are installed in the shrine on an auspicious day. Bhagat does a ritual to invoke the presence of the deity in the idol. There are both iconic (idol) and symbolic (lump of clay) forms of the diety. The process of worship is quite elaborated. The music band and singers (manaria) accompany Bhagat throughout the worship and that supports Bhagat in invoking the deity. The ritual starts in the evening on an auspicious day. The prasad includes Kheer (rice pudding), gulgula (made of wheat flour and jaggery), betel nuts, fruits, etc. The rituals are done both inside and outside the shrine, by the Bhagat. During the worship, Bhagat wearing garlands (and anklets bells) dances on the drum beats (accompanying instruments-Mridang, Jhallair, Kartal, Jhail)[51] and sings, doing a variety of steps of vigorous acrobatic movements (Bhagta Khelna) until the completion of the invoking process and finally starts enacting as the deity himself. The final ritual is the sprinkling of water and offering of hibiscus flowers to the deity and the distribution of Prasad. Baithki (special worship) by the Bhagat (priest) organised for individual households or families are need-based when the people (Kahali) need any divine treatment (Gohair) for their unsolved problems like certain diseases, theft, mishap, etc. Bhagat is paid for that service. This practice is widely popular not only among the related community of the deity but other communities (both upper and lower caste).[52] as well. However, their rituals are criticised as superstition by many others.

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[51] Yadav, Yaduvir. 5 October 2020. *Mithilak Lokgatha: Anushthan evam Prastuti*. Interview. www.youtube.com/channel/UCq5iWGHncVPLw8AG8wRjIKw
[52] *Festival of Salhes*. 2018. Feature. Accessed 11 October 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXUbZHD1fv4

Festival of Salhes (source: Razzmatazz Films Pvt. Ltd.)

Annual worship of Karikh Devta (source: Dr. Madhushree Seth)

Portrayal

There are four types of artistic representations of folklore - Mahrai (Singing), Nach (Theatre), Chitrakala/Bhittichitra (Painting/Mural), and Murtikala (Sculpture).

Mahrai (Singing)

The singing of these folklores is called Mahrai which is done both as a solo performance or a group performance. The below images show singer Bauku Mallik (right) doing a solo performance of Salhes Mahrai on his rare instrument Odhni Baja. The image of the singer Brahmdev Mahto (below right) is of a group performance of Kali Bandi Goraiya Mahrai includes one leading singer, a chorus, and instrument players.

Mahrai on Odhni Baja, Mushan Mallik
(source: Mithi Rang Tarang)

The image (below left) is a stage performance of the Bahura Godhin (a legend – female) Gayan by Lakshi Yadav and the group.[53] Traditionally, Mahrai is done by males which is also a similar case in community performances of Nach. However, female artists have started participating in stage performances, mostly in an urban setting. The instruments generally include Harmonium, Dholak, Jhail, Khajri, Chutta, Jhallair, etc. The singers portray various events of the life and deeds of the heroes (deities). It goes on for hours as per the demand of the audience.

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[53] Yadav, Lakshi and Group. 2019. *Bahura Godhin Gayan*. Performance. Accessed 15 October 2020. www.facebook.com/mithirang

Yadav, Lakshi and Group. 2019. Bahura Godhin Gayan. (source: Mithirang Lok Tarang)

Mahrai – Kali Bandi Goraiya by Brahmdev Mahto (source: Achhinjal India)

Nach (Theatre)

The theatrical expression of folklore in Mithila is called Nach e.g. Lorik Nach, Salhes Nach, Gopichand Nach, Kumar Brijbhan Nach, Bahura Godhin Nach, Hansraj-Vansraj Nach, Nal-Damyanti Nach and so many more. The earliest literary reference of Nach is in Varnaratnakar as Lorik Nach and others (the subsequent two pages in the original manuscript were destroyed), Lorik is the legend of the Yadav community. The plot and dramatic values are different in all these folk theatre acts but the style is the same. These acts primarily portray folklore around heroes, deities, and legends. Besides Nach, Mithila has other ancient and modern theatre forms, different in style and content, that includes contemporary theatre (modern content and Indo-western style), Women's Theatre - folk theatre (folkloristic and contemporary done by women only), and a unified folk/classical theatre called Kirtaniya Natya (based on Puranas), the traditional practice of which is almost extinct. It will be discussed in further sections.

[The term 'Classical' is the English substitute of the term 'Shastriye' in the Indian context mostly used in the field of arts such as Shastriye Nritya or Sangeet or Rangmanch (Classical dance or music or theatre). The term 'Shastra' generally means discipline of study, rules or science or grammar. The Indian treatise on theatre 'Natyashastra' is one of the foundational treatises on the discipline of arts which has been the basis and the source of inspiration for the development of arts in India, e.g. Sanskrit classical theatre. Thus, the term 'Shastriye' can be derived as 'according to the prescribed discipline, rules, science or grammar'. The term 'classical' denotes 'disciplinary' in this study, and the classical arts are those which have largely followed the discipline of arts. Many of them have also been patronized by the intellectuals and the authorities like rulers, temples, etc. In contrast, Folk arts have been free-flowing and explorative and have transformed with time. They are largely developed by Commons and supported by the communities.]

Nach Artist Gudia
(source: Abhishek Dev Narayan)

Salhes Nach' (Performance at Bharat Rang Mahotsav. Delhi. 6 February 2020
Design: Abhishek Dev Narayan. Direction: Yaduvir Bharti.
Producers: Nari Udgar Sanstha & Achhinjal. (source: Achhinjal)

Nach tradition transmitted from one generation to the other has all three aspects of music (both vocal and instrumental), dance/movement, and dialogues (in all three forms of prose, poetry and song). The language is Maithili.[54] Nach discusses different aspects of the life of the legend and connects with the life of the audience as well, for example- Deena-Bhadri Nach unfolds different sections of the life of two brothers, their relationship, family, struggle, works for community welfare and reforms across the region and the sacrifice. Salhes Nach revolves around the protagonist King Salhes, his life events, related characters, incidents, and dramatic expression of certain thoughts. The content of these Nach acts includes the pride of the state, patriotism, social harmony, love, bravery, the identity of the community, issues related to women, and the struggle for the rights of people, etc.[55] These acts

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[54] Malangia, Mahendra. 2009. *Maithili Loknatyak Vistrit Adhyayan evam Vishleshan*. Page 36
[55] Narayan, Abhishek Dev. 2020. *Maithili Theatre and Nach: A Stylistic Discussion*. July 2020. Year 10. Issue 4, Page 41

depict the related folklore beautifully by the male artists (only) who belong to the lower communities and play both the male and female characters. Participation in these performances goes beyond the respective communities and they are extremely popular among people of different strata. The performance goes on for multiple nights unfolding several events related to the legend and various improvisations.[56] Nach is one of the prominent examples of community theatre. The performances are funded by the people as charity. The teams are hired and performances are organized by the community, both upper and lower. The performances are clubbed with other festivals and occasions like 'Durga Puja' when the entire village comes together to organize them. People hire the group to perform during their family occasions or marriages as well. Interestingly, the characters of a Nach acknowledge the funders/organisers during the performance or present the act to them, calling them 'Malik' (master) or 'Panchan' (village leaders), etc. They also improvise the dialogues, especially by the 'Bipta' (Anchor - Joker). Bipta is an improvisational character, though allegorical, dressed up as a Joker (similar to the circus), enacts mostly as anchor and minister but also as different characters as/when required, and even supports in managing properties during the performance.[57] A similar character is also found in other folk theatre forms like 'Bibek/Vivek' (conscience) in Bengal's Jatra theatre or 'Labaar' in Bidesia style or 'Vidushak' in Sanskrit classical theatre. Bipta frequently interacts with the audience and brings forth everyday issues of the locals and connects that with the plot. The characters make references related to the audience like scarcity of jobs, the problem of schools and hospitals, etc., and comment on that.

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[56] Das, Mahendra. 7 January 2020. *Performance of Salhes Nach*. Interview.
www.youtube.com/channel/UCq5iWGHncVPLw8AG8wRjIKw
[57] Observation and Participation. 2020. *King Salhes Nach*. Performance design. Nari Ugdar Sanstha (Producer). Performance on 5 February 2020 at Bharat Rang Mahotsav 2020, Delhi. Website- www.21brm.nsd.gov.in

Chitrakala/Bhittichitra (Painting/Mural)

The painting and mural tradition of Mithila has multiple facets and a great deal of visual expressions. Godna (tattoo) and Manjusha are the popular styles of painting that have folklore as the prime subject. This age-old tradition came to be known to the outer world during the earthquake of 1934, when a British colonial officer in Madhubani District, William G. Archer, inspecting the damage "discovered" the murals on the newly exposed interior walls of homes. The mural and painting tradition developed and primarily practiced by women dates back to the ancient time at least the 14th century[58], however, having the ancient mythological references of its practice, the evolution phase may have been longer and started many centuries ago, the use of motifs related to tribal life is one of the aspects of its antiquity. In 1968 with the support from the All-India handicrafts board, some of the artists began to paint gods/goddesses, symbolic icons, etc. on paper. Later in the 1970s, the artists from the Dusadh community started painting the deities/legends/heroes based on folklore. Murals are also continuously made and can be seen on the walls in many houses. Mithila painting is now a world-famous art and part of various permanent collections and museums across the world including the 'Mithila Museum', situated in Tokamachi hills in Japan`s Niigata prefecture.

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[58] *Mithila Painting: The Evolution of an Art Form*. Webpage. Accessed 15 October, 2020. www.mithilapaintings-eaf.org.

Chano Devi   *Ghosts of Salhesh*   22"x30"   2005

(source: Peter Zirnis)

Salhes's Garden. Anonymous. (source: Peter Zirnis)

The artists paint different life events of the legend and use various motifs like the tree of life, parrot, love birds, ant, butterfly, elephant, horse, etc. In this painting (below), Salhes can be seen with all his beloved Malin, in the two paintings on previous page, Salhes is approaching his garden and the ghosts of Salhes made by Chano Devi. The Godna style is derived from traditional tattoo-making. These paintings have distinctive features like the faces are simply two straight lines forming an angle with a dot for the eye - just a notation to indicate the head in profile - there is no signature Mithila almond-shaped eye. In the painting Ghosts of Salhesh, the repetition of the single black figure and the wavy uneven line adds to the otherworldly effect. [59]

Salhes by Uttam Paswan (source: Sunil Kumar)

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[59] *Salhes, Dushadh Hero*. Webpage. Accessed 15 October 2020. www.peterzirnis.com

Manjusha painting is about 1200 years old, originated in the Bhagalpur region of Bihar, and connected with Mali (gardener) community and others. The central theme is based on the folklore 'Bihula Bishhari' and the goddess Mansa Devi. The related sculptures found in the excavation of ancient Vikramshila university place the folklore before the 5th-6th century CE. Mostly, there are three colours used in the painting, pink, yellow, and green which depict love, prosperity, and growth.[60] Another interpretation of these colours is marriage, celebration, and snakebite respectively. The folklore is full of magic (Tantra/Mantra) and mysticism, however, symbolises various aspects of human life,[61] the five Bishhari (snakes goddesses, believed to be the daughters of lord Shiva) symbolise the five psychological defects of desire, anger, greed, attachment and arrogance (image-below).

Manjusha painting, (source: www.manjushakala.in)

[60] *Bihar Ki Manjusha Kala – Ek Adbhut Dharohar*. 2018. Feature. Live History India. Accessed 11 October 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHYmmKSc3ko

[61] *Manjusha Kala*. 2020. Interview with Dr. Amrendra. Webpage. Accessed 11 October 2020. www.folkartopedia.com

Manjusha (image- below) also symbolizes the boat in which Bihula travelled to heaven to fight for her husband's life,[62] who is killed by Bishhari. 'Manjusha in Sanskrit means 'box'. The word is used for the ceremonial temple-shaped bamboo, jute straw, and paper boxes used by devotees to store items for Bishahari Puja. The Manjusha boxes signify the box that is said to have covered the body of Bala Lakhendra in the folklore of Bihula-Bishahari. According to the legend, the temple-shaped box, known as Manjusha, was adorned with Bihula's story along with the flora and fauna of Anga, hence is said to be the point from where the art form of the same name originated. To understand the significance of Manjusha art, it is essential to know the folklore of Bihula-Bishahari.'[63] The motifs are linked with different aspects of the legend's life as well as the people's - relation with nature, love, happiness, struggle, etc. For the folklore, the prominent artists include Jamuna Devi, Chano Devi, Urmila Devi (all Godna), and Chakravarty Devi, Shekhar, Manoj Pandit, Ulupi Jha (all Manjusha), to name a few. The depiction of folklore in visual art has enhanced its various aspects including the development of symbols, metaphors, as well as has introduced it to the whole world.

Manjusha. (Source: Live History India)

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[62] *Manjusha Kala ka Vartman aur Bhavishya: Ek Aatm Pareekshan*. 2020. Webpage. Accessed 11 October 2020. www.folkartopedia.com
[63] *Manjusha: Exploring Traditional Art from Anga Pradesh*. Accessed 10 March 2021. www.sahapedia.org

Murtikala (Sculpture)

One of the most important aspects of the portrayal of folklore is sculptures made by the Kumhar community. Besides making the earthen utensils, decorative artefacts, etc., a practice of making terracotta idols and other sculptures for different occasions is widely seen. The folklore is beautifully depicted in the sculptures which are made to be installed in the temples. The motifs like Horse-rider, Elephant, Parrot-Maina, Kalash, Ahibatak Patil (lamp pot), thak-bak (heron), etc. are related to various good omen, auspicious symbols, god/goddesses, legends/deities, etc. The clay is prepared by mixing it with sand, jute, cow dung, mica, ash, etc. The potter's wheel, baking techniques, and colours help bring fineness into the work. The pattern of design and style of painting resemble the styles of other Mithila visual art like Kachni and Bharni (hatching/cross-hatching), use of bold colours, etc. Earlier, they were painted in natural colours – vegetable and organic colours extracted from different objects, like yellow from turmeric, colours from saffron, and coal, chalk, etc., however now they use chemical-based colours easily available in the local market.[64]

Deena Bhadri, Supaul (Source: Pushyamitra

[64] *Festival of Salhes*. 2018. Feature. Accessed 11 October 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXUbZHD1fv4

Some of these artistic traditions based on folklores are struggling for survival. Though the level of consciousness among its followers towards community identity and acceptance among other communities has increased, the overall pattern of Maithil life is changing. These traditions on the one hand getting tough competition from modern means of entertainment, urban synthetic culture, and technological enhancement, and on the other hand, they are facing the changing perceptions of traditional identity. Somehow, this is a transitional period that makes artists and their children face a dilemma, whether to opt for a new set of professions and leave the traditional practice or to explore new avenues for their art.

By Lala Pandit, Laheriasarai   By Lala Pandit, Laheriasarai   Salhes Gahwar, Laheriasarai
(source: Sunil Kumar)

Perspective on the Practice

Folklores of Mithila represent a collective of community in the form of a repertoire of cultural and artistic expressions. That can be seen through various angles, whether the aspects of the zeal of community life, or the relationship at both intra-community and inter-community levels. Under this big umbrella, we see various explorations at metaphysical, aesthetic, moral, and social levels. Some of these explorations are analysed below. Besides the aesthetical journey through the artistic creations, the variety of practices show the collective expression of identity whether in their spiritual explorations and discourse or the consciousness towards inter-community co-existence or their response to inequality and discrimination.

The performances and presentations of folklores have seen many changes in their form, style, execution, etc. Different interpretations have influenced popular practices like Manipadm through his two novels Raja Salhes (1973) and Anang Kusma (1999) influenced the literary world with the logical representation of the history, personality, and struggle of Salhes as a hero. Gradually, the conversion of Salhes from a leader of underprivileged mass to a mystical deity started reflecting in literature, performance, and painting. The divinity also brought embellishments into the depictions like elaborated love affairs.[65] Above all, folklore is the brainchild of a community and various presenters have added different flavours to it. Somehow, the artists and creators have their distinct ways of perceiving things and different methodologies for execution. In the visual arts, as discussed earlier, a great deal of imagination, symbolic representation, use of colours, patterns, and a variety of artefacts are visible. Similarly in dramatic acts of folklore, that reflects in the techniques like details of sequence, variety of enactment, varied

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[65] Kumar, Sunil. 2018. *Lokala aur Sahitya ke Aaine men Salhes*. Webpage. Accessed 18 October 2020. www.sahapedia.org

characterization, use of music- songs and rhythm, movement, improvisation, and so on.[66] Performers use the interesting aspect of 'satire' to delineate the mentality of people and the truth of time through dialogues and gestures. They also brought contemporariness and current reference by connecting the characters to the society, for example – a character asks his master's permission for a leave by saying, 'Suniyo Suniyo E Sarkar, Ghar se elai Tar, Hammar kaniya chhai bimaar' (Listen to me O Lord, I got a telegram from home, my wife is sick). The telegram was invented in the last century only.[67] The performance of folklore goes on for several nights. Sometimes a particular scene on demand is performed in multiple ways, for example – Chandravati, the beloved of Salhes expresses her love in a variety of ways using different movements, dialogues, and gestures. Similarly, when Chandravati expresses her emotion of longing for Salhes and the efforts she has made to get even a glimpse of him, goes on for hours.

> Bad bad bhagti hum isbar sn keliyai,
>
> Seelanath sheelbatti pujaliyai,
>
> Raiv shain hum paavan thekaliyai,
>
> Tulsi gaachh me jal dharaliyai, taiyo ne baimanma piyaba darshan delkai!
>
> Bisaul jay bismitti pujaliyai,
>
> Kulhar geliayi Girija pujaliyai,

[66] Observation and Participation. 2020. *King Salhes Nach*. Performance design. Nari Ugdar Sanstha (Producer). Performance on 5 February 2020 at Bharat Rang Mahotsav 2020, Delhi. Website- www.21brm.nsd.gov.in

[67] Malangia, Mahendra. 2018. *Folklore Raja Salhes*. Interview. Accessed 11 October 2020. . ANN India. Accessed 11 October 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=cp31FRvGV3Q

Mareech khoit ke aragh hum deliyai,

Purain paat par jhijhri khelaliyai, taiyo ne baimanma piyaba darshan delkai!

In a great state of longing and desire for her lover Salhes whom she has just heard of but never met, Chandravati sings and dances, 'I have pleaded with the god, worshipped the sheelanath sheelbatti, kept fast on Saturday and Sunday, watered the basil plant but the merciless lover hasn't showed up. I went to Bisaul to worship bismitti, went to Kulhar to worship goddess Girija, scraped the black pepper for offering, did jhijhri dance on the lotus leaf but the merciless lover hasn't showed up. This song goes on for many hours. Chandravati keeps talking about the difficult worship she does to meet her lover, whether visiting different places and worshipping or doing difficult things like scraping black pepper or doing jhijhri dance barefooted on the sharp spiny lotus leaf with a pot on head, and so on.

Similarly, after the long wait, when Chandravati meets with Salhes in a flower garden, the actor shows the extreme pleasure in a variety of ways. These performances have many such examples of the artistic variety. The actors improvise according to the situation and on the demand of audience as well. Whether the love, romance, struggle, tragedy, or comedy, the thousands of audiences stay with the artists continuously on several nights. Despite having watched the performances for several times in their life, they still enjoy and participate every time with the same enthusiasm.

The consciousness of Identity

Generally, particular folklore depicts the sensibilities of a particular community, and it is formulated and developed by the community itself. As discussed earlier, a community (caste) identity is expressed through the community-specific folklores and related deities/heroes. However, participation in the related rituals and portrayal goes beyond the community. The genealogical (caste-based) stratification in Mithila is more or less similar to that of the other parts of India, however, may vary in complexity and social engagement, as discussed further in a separate chapter on genealogical records (Panji Prabandh). The imposed social structure has confined the people to their community and restricted them to certain norms in terms of occupation, the opportunity for advancement, social status, human-social values, and social life. Folklores can be seen as the immediate response to inequality and discrimination, and their effort to bring about justice. Imtiyaz Ahmad in 'Dalit Lokgathaon men Pratirodh', emphasizes, 'Anger, Resistance, the realisation of victimisation and related emotions are natural human tendencies. Expression of those emotions depends upon the nature of the person, caste, class, economic situation, and social status. The way, a Brahman (affluent among upper class) or a landlord expresses these emotions, a Dalit cannot do. Dalits have their own style of body language to express themselves'.[68] The heroes like Salhes, Deena-Bhadri, Lorik, Bahura Godhin, and others, though portrayed as king or leader and are well-positioned in the community, adhering to the traditional occupation and other norms. However, they protest against discrimination and lead the community in the struggle. Through these folklores, the community becomes vocal about their stand and right. The folklore specialist and playwright Mahendra Malangia finds (King Salhes) folklore not only important for the study of the

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[68] Ahmad, Imtiyaz. 2009. *Dalit Lokgathaon men Pratirodh*. Delhi: Jos Kalapura. Page 19.

socio-economic development of Dalits[69] but it also portrays revolt against the Brahmanical[70] social order and the biases against Dalits. It helps Dalit express incisively and outspokenly.[71] Interestingly, the protagonists of these folklores do not appear to resist some of the norms like occupation or community rituals, nevertheless, they present the excellence of that work and fight to establish their values. Community through these lores and different portrayals present the unity of the people, their social participation, and take a stand on their right place in the society and a perceived or acquired identity, not the imposed one. The female characters in Salhes are very strong and even stronger than males at several points. They save Salhes, even in the impossible situation difficult to be tackled by his army, as per the story. Salhes is loved by many women who want to marry him but he sticks to just one wife, that may be considered as a moral lesson for the community. Salhes goes through different struggles with the kings of upper castes for the social, political, and religious rights of the community. Similarly, the legend of Deena-Bhadri connects with various aspects of social life. The depiction of their support to Brahmans, temples, Muslims and heroes from other communities seem to be based on the concept of collective living and the important contribution of the Mushar community to society. These martyrs keep helping the community as spirits and fighting the evils. That can be seen as the resilience and perseverance of a weak socio-economic community towards their strong social commitment. Both the brothers are also worshipped as Baghaut Baba, the heroes who sacrificed their lives in fighting with the tiger (Bagh) to save the people. Other such deities include Fheku Ram of the Halwai community or Jeevram of the Yadav

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[69] *Dalit* is a socio-cultural term depicting marginalised people, for the constitutional term 'Schedule caste'.

[70] *Brahmanical* (related to Brahman caste) is a socio-political term placing the Brahman at the top of social hierarchy.

[71] Malangia, Mahendra. 2018. *Folklore Raja Salhes*. Interview. Accessed 11 October 2020. ANN India. Accessed 11 October 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=cp31FRvGV3Q

community. In another folklore, Bahura Godhin is a female protagonist in the folklore 'Dulra Dayal/Bahura Godhin' of the Mallah community who are traditional fishers and boat makers. Bahura is a magician (Tantric) who fights the mighty landlord for the right of the community over access to river resources.

Spiritual Exploration and Discourse

The folklores do provide a spiritual or religious framework for their followers. It can be seen through two major lines of thought – first, a search for a parallel system and second, associating with the mainstream system. The former thought process lies in the religious hegemony and subsequent infringement of rights to access religious or spiritual practices, whereas the latter lies either in the urge for social co-existence or in the effort of creating the discourse against religious monopoly, as experts say. Several lower communities have been untouchables and even in the present time, there are instances of such behaviours like barring them from temples or biases at schools, hospitals, etc. The communities in an inadequate social situation have crises on the economic, political, or cultural front also (or vice-versa). These Bahujan[72] communities find their voice in these folklores and so do their spiritual quest as well.[73] The visual representation of folklore in the painting also saw such a transformation. According to Late Raudi Paswan, a Mithila painter, the earlier religious affiliation of Mithila painting was Brahmanical, and thus when Dusadh painters started working on paper, they followed the same trend of painting the popular gods like Ram and Krishna. The

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[72] *Bahujan* means 'Many people' - another term used for Dalit/disadvantegd as they constitute the largest section of population in India.
[73] Deewana, Ram Shreshtha. 2017. *Folklore Raja Salhesh: In literature's perspective*. Interview. Accessed 11 October 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2vss1KetRE

dominant castes opposed that and forced them to shift to their own subjects and named the painting 'Dalit painting'. Starting with painting the community's daily life and activities, the artists adopted folklore as content and motif and the design of the tattoo as a style of painting.[74] The heroes worshipped as deities, their mystical persona, the rituals, temples, the offerings, and the beliefs to the heroes as saviour or wish granter, etc. have placed these heroes as the gods worshipped by many and as parallel to the gods of prevalent religions. The communities fulfil their spiritual or religious needs through their own conception of deities, and the bases of that conception and further development, unlike the dominating Vedic/Hindu religion of Mithila, have had unique elements of equality, inclusion, openness, etc. The followers have their own experience and account of connecting with the deities through various activities, music, meditation (invocation) e.g. a Bhagat's way to connect, and various rituals.

The urge for social co-existence reflects in the adaptation of prevalent notions of religion including the perception of gods, myths, rituals, etc. For example- the portrayal of Salhes resembles as prominent Hindu god Krishna doing Rasleela[75] with many Malin, the girls of Mali (gardener) community, or the two brothers Deena and Bhadri presented as another prominent Hindu god Ram and his brother Laxman in songs, painting, and sculpture. The theatrical representation of these folklores has many similarities. One can see it as an artist's effort to include the audience from various communities (both upper and lower) by following a popular narrative of gods/goddesses. It can also be seen as adopting the artistic or spiritual value of these gods to make the characters prominent. Another argument may be

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[74] Kumar, Sunil. 2018. *Lokala aur Sahitya ke Aaine men Salhes*. Webpage. Accessed 18 October 2020. www.sahapedia.org
[75] *Rasleela* is the popular love act of lord Krishna with Gopis (the village girls), has immense religious and artistic value.

the connection of the unified folk/classical theatre of mediaeval Mithila (also named Kirtaniya) based on Leela[76] from Puranas along the line of the Vaishnava movement[77]. Kirtaniya and its two successors Ankiya of Assam and Upatyaka of Nepal[78] present a unique blend of 'Bhasha Sangeetak', a derivative of Sanskrit theatre and the folk theatre of Mithila. Though the playwrights in Kirtaniya theatre were largely scholars from the upper caste, the artists were the Nach performers and they may have infused some of those ideas and elements into the contemporary folk theatre. However, with regard to the ideation behind the adoption of popular notions, there are other thoughts. Vishwanath Jha in his book 'Chaupal Jaati ka Sach' (1997) terms it as 'Ascension of divinity' as an effort to subdue the uprising of Dalit expression. These commoners' heroes are conceptualized in the folklores as the resistance to the exploiting forces including the dominating religious practices.[79] Nevertheless, such ascension of divinity is a common practice across the religions of the world. It has become so obvious and a common trend that any deliberate effort is hard to be noticed by the followers. Many performing groups funded by landlords and affluent people of society may have modified their presentation to fulfil the 'demand' or simply as an effort to please them.

In the effort of changing the discourse against religious monopoly, 'there are changes made in the content and presentation of the folklores. A particular section of scholars has made efforts to establish Brahmanical divinity and supremacy by promoting ritualistic engagement, with an aim to deviate the resistance. Another

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[76] *Leela* is the theatre based on the deeds of god Krishna (and Ram), like Ramleela, Rasleela, Kirtaniya, Ankia, etc.
[77] *Vaishnava movement* was the social-religious reformist movement by the propagators/followers of god Vishnu.
[78] Chaudhary, Radhakrishna. 2010. *A survey of Maithili Literature*. Pages 81, 107, 108 and 117
[79] Kumar, Sunil. 2018. *Lokala aur Sahitya ke Aaine men Salhes*. Webpage. Accessed 18 October 2020. www.sahapedia.org

section engaged in finding the historicity of these heroes and for challenging the refractory politics of Brahman ended up making them the part of the Brahmanical group of gods.' That sidelined the actual discourse.[80] The socio-political and religious aspects of this discussion pose questions related to the spiritual needs of people. Can it be manipulated? It is believed that humans have a natural quest to find the reason and the cause of their existence. For that, any religion gives a framework, standards, ideals, process, etc. However, individuals have their own internal journey towards this ultimate quest, no matter how it is defined and adhered to in the external world. On this line, though the folklores give a framework whether originally conceived or borrowed or manipulated, they have not restricted the followers so far. Any further politicization may bring conservativeness and desire to monopolise, as evident in popular religions.

Inter-community co-existence

The folklores talk about how their protagonists are humanly rooted, compassionate for people's welfare, keep social concerns on priority, and lead the disadvantaged in the struggle against the mighty and destructive forces. They live a life of a particular community but establish dialogues with other communities. Right from rituals to the performance, a collective approach is visible. For example- In the annual Salhes festival, one can see the contributions of different communities, Kumhar makes the idol, Mali makes the garlands, Jhanp (painting on triangular-shaped corolla) and Gerua (Cylindrical structure using bamboo and corolla), and others like Chamar (the musicians), Ahir, etc. An integral section of the ritual of

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[80] Imam, Hasan. 2009. *Dalit Lokgathaon men Pratirodh*. Introduction.

family deity/community deity is the worship of 'Chaudah Debaan'[81] (fourteen deities) including one chief deity (debaan) of the worshipper community and thirteen associate deities belonging to different communities (including a Muslim hero Meera sahib/Meer Sultan and prominent Vedic/Hindu gods/goddesses). The selection of these associates vary from community to community, the names include Bhagwati, Gahil, Vamti, Fekuram, Balapeer/Meera, Kalika, Hanuman, Bhairav, Vishhara, Dharmraj, Saheb Khabaas, Meer Sultan, Govind, Sokha Shambhunath, Jalpa, Goril, Durga, Meera, Ganga, Karikh, Datula, Lakhatlal Pandey, Jyoti Panjiyar, Sheetla, Ameek Mai, Salhes, Motiram, Budhesar, Bahin Bansapti, Bhagin Koirkana, Sugga Hiraman, Kevla Keerant, Deenaram, Bhadri, Chuharmal, Goraiya, Hiriya-Jiriya, Pancho Aghori, Tripursundari, Nrisingh[82], etc. People from upper communities have different perceptions of these deities, some of them do have faith, take part in the worship, make offerings and seek the blessing of strength whereas others do not believe or are refrain from any public demonstration of their faith, for example- a person from upper community greeting or bowing down before Salhes's statue/temple is still a rare sight as Salhes belongs to an untouchable community traditionally. Though such a situation seems paradoxical, somehow the collective belief in these deities brings forth the aspect of inclusivity, acceptance, and plurality. One may argue that superstitious beliefs towards unforeseen circumstances make the people god-fearing and they end up believing more and more such things. That might be true, nevertheless, such a thing can be seen with a social perspective in which collective living and inter-dependence are the chief components. Also, a general sensibility or tendency to

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[81] Yadav, Yaduvir. 5 October 2020. *Mithilak Lokgatha: Anushthan evam Prastuti*. Interview. www.youtube.com/channel/UCq5iWGHncVPLw8AG8wRjIKw

[82] Mishra Ambikesh. 2020. *Mithila men Dharmraj aur unke Sahaayak Debaan*. Webpage. Accessed 20 October 2020. www.csts.org.in

find uniformity or commonness is found among human societies despite all the prevalent notions of odds and differences.

The folklore represents the sensibility, belief, history, notions, and overall life of the related community. Art and aesthetics give the language to the perception, intuition, or notion of people/communities based on certain faith, belief, or references from history or life. That is further encoded and expressed through various oral traditions/textual forms/visual arts as well as the diverse range of performances. The followers, viewers, receivers or thinkers decode them, comprehend them, and share their understanding with others. It is somehow a continuous cyclic process, and an adequate example of that is the folklore of Mithila. The cultural region of Mithila is a conjugation of diverse communities and their respective sensibilities. The age-old folklores of Mithila form a knowledge tradition, the knowledge of so-called uncivilized or unsophisticated, disadvantaged and marginalised evolved and developed on the periphery of alleged civilized society. This section has tried to unfold and analyse the artistic expressions of the folklore. It has discussed various aspects of artistic and aesthetic brilliance, intra/inter-community co-existence, expression of collective identity and spiritual or religious discourse found throughout the representation of these folklores. They have evolved over the ages. Their structure, knitting of the story-telling and the discussions are well-articulated and have ample space for improvisation. On the artistic front, the folklores and their creative depictions have been instrumental in shaping the entire artistic canvas of Mithila. The social, ethical and spiritual discussions found in these folklores provide the checks and balances that help society revisit and reinvent itself. They adhere to the prevalent social norms; at the same time, they prepare the community to reflect on the situation, rediscover and change their positioning in society. That can be seen in the spiritual or religious

framework they provide whether to facilitate the search for a parallel religious system against the religious hegemony or to pave the way to associate with the mainstream system while creating the discourse against religious monopoly. The folklores also present a progressive model of the social fabric in which the co-existence and collective living are nicely embedded as warp and weft. That can be seen as the resilience and perseverance of these weak socio-economic communities towards maintaining the social cohesiveness in the region, which has always helped Mithila evolve, develop, sustain, be rooted and be alive.

Chapter 4

Critical Consciousness (Theatre Arts)

Theatre Art is one of the most creative artistic expressions of our society. It has given platforms for the depiction of multiple perspectives of individuals and the community at large. It provides a strong medium of artistic expression and human identity. It contains various integral elements of Performance, Pedagogy, and Discourse. A performance consists of both, the development of a work of art (process) and presenting it to the audience as a completion of the developing process (a product), nevertheless, the process keeps on going adding more values based on the experience of the presentation, the reflection of the audience, or new perceptions, etc. That makes the audience an integral element of the performance in addition to the playwright, director, and artists (including technicians).[83] Theatre as a Pedagogy is widely applied, primarily in the domain of Education with the focus on the aspects of creativity, well-being, constructive and dialectic approaches, etc.[84] Theatre is also being explored as therapy. The element of Discourse is applied through a critical inquiry process during various community dialogues and developmental activities. Theatre of the oppressed is one of the most effective techniques developed by Augusto Boal who applied various ideas taken from folk/Indigenous theatre and games across the world[85] to build his action-oriented, discursive theatre pedagogy inspired by Paul Freire's theory of

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[83] Narayan, Abhishek Dev. 2018. *The Directorial perspective: Mahendra Malangia's Play-writing Process*. Page 14.

[84] Narayan, Abhishek Dev. 16 June 2020. *Theatre-in-Education*. Webinar. Accessed 10 October, 2020.

[85] Boal, Augusto. 2002. *Games for Actors and Non-actors*. Pages 8 and 30.

'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'. Freire applied his ideas in education both for the reproduction of knowledge and transformation of the knower through the process of 'Conscientizacao' which refers to learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, to break the 'culture of silence' and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.[86] The pedagogy he devised facilitates the learners' critical understanding and reconstruction of the consciousness. Augusto Boal says, ''At its simplest, the idea underlying this is that 'a picture paints a thousand words', that images can be closer to our true feelings, even our subconscious feelings.'' All the creative processes depict parts of us. Boal further says about art as ''a core of the creative process and that 'art is immanent to all men (human).''[87] ''The idea that we are born 'knowing' art explains how creative processes enable us to make images which reflect, communicate and at times weave our disparate views of the world into something universal.''[88] His scholarly work 'Games for Actors and Non-Actors' is important in this regard.[89] The creative-critical approaches open up both inward and outward space for self-discovery, positioning in life as well as a method for critical consciousness and learning. Every culture has a particular theatre form or theatrical ways of expression and that is indebted to the tradition of artistic expression that flourished in the ages. Mithila's theatre art has its unique journey and it has influenced the various aspects of life. The concept of critical consciousness is reflected in the characterisation of the aspects of life, the discussion, and the mode of expression. Besides devising the artistic expressions clubbed with various aesthetic values,

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[86] Freire, Paul. 2005. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York/London: Continuum. Preface
[87] Boal, Augusto. 2002. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. Page xx
[88] Morgan, Patricia. *The Potential of Creative Arts as a Medium for Mental Health Promotion in Schools*. Accessed 26 November, 2020
[89] Boal, Augusto. 2002. *Games for Actors and Non-actors*. Pages 8 and 30.

these practices continuously open up various debates around human/social values, social issues and social justice.

In the previous chapter, the theatrical representation of folklore, Nach is discussed. Besides Nach - one of the major folk theatre forms of Mithila,[90] there are other prominent theatre styles, currently being practiced in different nooks and corners of the region and beyond. These styles have evolved and developed in different eras and now at different stages, some are endangered, others being modified to suit the changing time.

Structure of the Practice

The theatre practices of Mithila can broadly be classified into three genres, Folk Theatre, Unified Folk/Classical Theatre, and Contemporary Theatre.

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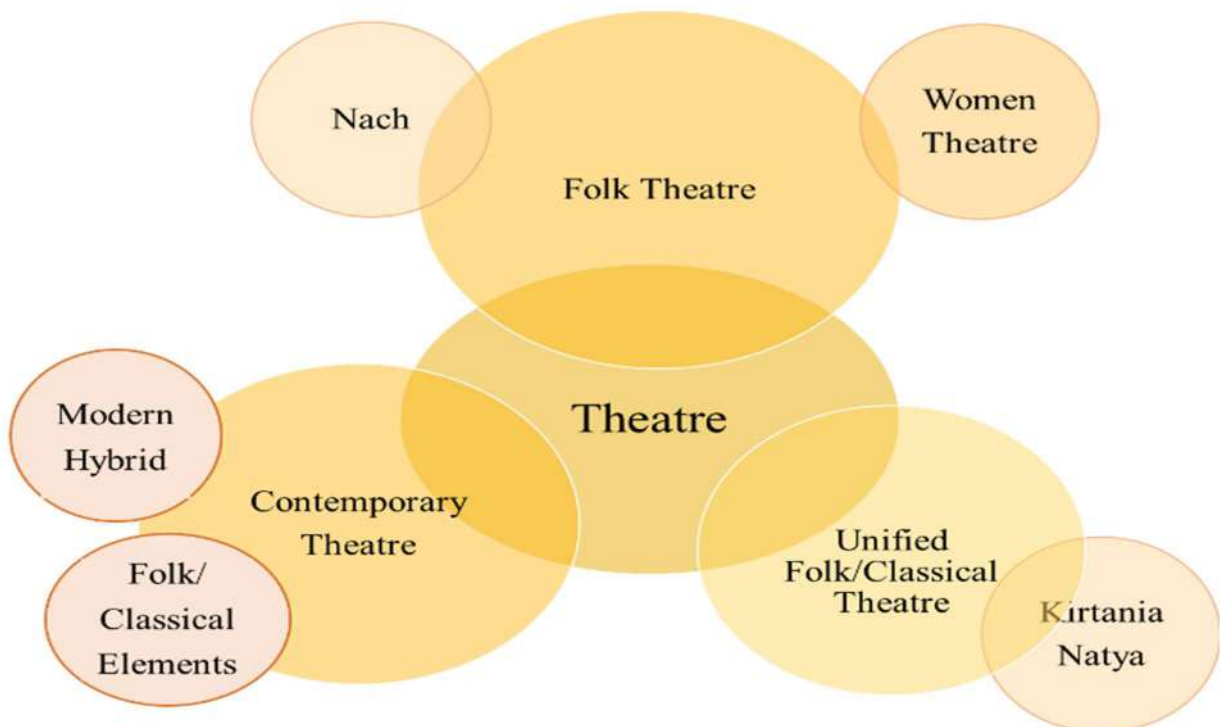
[90] Narayan, Abhishek Dev. 2020. *Maithili Theatre and Nach: A Stylistic Discussion*. Page 42

Folk theatre is one of the ancient arts widely practiced in Mithila. The subjects of folk theatre are largely folklore as well as contemporary topics discussed alongside the folklore. Nach and Women's Theatre are two types where Nach is mostly the depiction of cults and deities as discussed in detail in the previous chapter on 'folklore' and Women's Theatre through the portrayal of folklore, rituals, festivals or everyday life, discusses the life of women. The unified folk/classical theatre is a combination of folk theatre and the derivatives of Sanskrit classical theatre like Bhasha Sangeetak developed throughout the medieval India. The third genre is the contemporary theatre which is being practiced today. A detailed discussion on these genres is done further in this chapter. Though all these genres have multiple common elements including language (Maithili), cultural and historical references such as characters, story, connections with everyday life, basic elements of conception and performance, and so on, this classification will help position the characteristics and uniqueness of these forms for a focused discussion. Also, the wider meaning of folk, as discussed with regard to the folklore as a universal base, remains intact, and folk theatre makes the foundation of all these developments. The major criteria of distinction include the content of plays, style of presentation, and the practitioners, there may be others as well. The description of the Structure of the Practice will be followed by discussing the Perspective on the Practice.

Women's Theatre

Folk theatre can further be categorised into Nach and Women's Theatre. Since Nach is already discussed in the previous chapter, it is interesting to see how distinct the women's theatre is? Both of them have ritualistic values and they are age-old, with no established historicity but inherent in Maithil life. The differences lie in the type of performers, Nach is performed by the male-only (both male and female character) whereas the women's theatre, as the name suggests is a women's domain in all respect. The former has a mixed audience but the latter is completely restricted to women only. The substantial content of women's theatre is also derived from the folklores and has ritualistic value, however, that is more connected with everyday life in terms of characters and sequences, as compared to Nach. However, the women's theatre is confined to the courtyard of their houses whereas Nach is a public affair.

Domkachh (source: Abhishek Dev Narayan)

The tradition of women's theatre is found in other communities in India as well. It is a women's space - theatre of the women, for the women, and by the women. Though women in Mithila express themselves in paintings and songs, it has been the only space for the women to perform and express freely but within the limits of the courtyard, as every woman whether from any community, upper or lower has had similar situation that they are not allowed to perform publicly. Nevertheless, things in the urban setting have started changing in the last few decades and women now participate openly. The occasions of these performances are varied, as part of festivals, rituals, leisure time, or post-harvest time. The performing space is in a courtyard of any participants' home.

Jat-Jatin_Public Performance (Abhishek Dev Narayan)

Some of these existing performances are being traced in various folk music and dance forms mentioned in Varnaratnakar, like Nagni (as Lagni), Varti (as Batgamani), Huluk (as Huruki), or Pratigeet (as Jat-Jatin). These similarities are contested and related scholars have different views on that.[91] Nevertheless, the extent of practice and involvement of the practitioners themselves are important, historicity may/may not be the added flavour. Phool Devi, an expert artist, and leader of a women's theatre group 'Nari Udgar Sansthan' describes their performances as for entertainment, expressing happiness, sharing life's events, or the stories of their struggle. These performances include popular theatrical acts like Domkachh, Jat-Jatin, Sama-Chakeba, and other improvised acts of Girhath-Girhathin, Raja-Rani, Dhobia-Dhobin, etc.[92] The festival of Sama-Chakeba is celebrated in the month of Kartik (October-November) which starts during the grand festival of Chhath Purv and completes on the full moon. The music and theatre acts are part of the festival. Though the scholars question its dramatic elements or whether it is a theatre at all[93], women perform it their own way. The act based on a story connects with the ritual of the festival which celebrates the love between brother and sister, said to be in commemoration of the daughter, her husband, and son of Lord Krishna. The story primarily focuses on the injustice of Krishna, the consequences faced by other characters, and the struggle to find justice eventually.

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[91] Malangia, Mahendra. 2015. *Shabdak Jangal Men Arthak Khoj.* (Commentary on Varnaratnakar). Page 70-72 and 79-81.
[92] Devi, Phool. 8 January 2020. *Women's Theatre*. Interview
[93] Malangia, Mahendra. 2009. *Maithili Loknatyak Vistrit Adhyayan evam Vishleshan*. Page 101-102.

Sumiran (source: Abhishek Dev Narayan)

Jat-Jatin is performed to wish for the rain during the months of Jeth, Ashadh, and Savan (late summer). It is based on an ancient belief that if women from lower communities beat a frog in the pounder and throw the dead frog away to a Brahman's house, the more the Brahman abuses, the more it rains. In the songs and the dialogues, lord Indra, believed to be a Brahman, is criticized and so are the landlords for their selfishness and exploitation. The act follows the story of the couple Jat-Jatin, their life, their day-to-day struggle, migration, etc. Similarly, Domkachh is also a story of the daily life and plight of a couple, Dom and Domin from the untouchable community. Similar acts are found in other parts of the country as well, like Nakta in Kannauj or Jodia in Haryana. It is performed during the marriage ceremony, women from the upper community perform it on the 4th day (Chaturthi) of marriage at the bride's place whereas women from the lower

community perform it on the night of marriage at the groom's place.[94] There are several other acts women do and they keep on devising new ones. Improvisation is the most important element in these performances that makes every show different from others and adds on a new flavour.

Perspective on the Practice

The notion of the practice lies in the tradition of art practiced by women secretly within a confined limit of expression. However, that barrier seems to be at a physical level or in limiting the public expression of women, imposed by the male-dominated society. That is also reflected in the late participation of Maithil women even in the modern theatre or in the urban setting of the alleged civilized society of the upper community, the first-ever participation in the late 1970s.[95] Though things are slowly changing in the urban environment, the rural scenario is still harsh for public performance by women. Phool Devi and her team are one of those women from the lower community who first dared to perform in her village. They still face hostility from the men of their communities as well as other males or even females sometimes.[96] Ironically, their free expressions on various topics like the men-women relationship, sex life, or women's plight, are labelled as vulgarity, their effort to break the confinement is seen as irresponsibility or hostility and so the chauvinists do not approve of any public appearance of women. It is still a harsh reality, although changes are being brought about.

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[94] Malangia, Mahendra. 2009. *Maithili Loknatyak Vistrit Adhyayan evam Vishleshan*. Page 107-109.
[95] Mishra, Jaykanta. 1988. *Maithili Scene: Drama Forges Ahead.* Indian Literature. Vol-31. No-6 (128). Delhi: Sahitya Akademi. Page 53.
[96] Devi, Phool. 8 January 2020. *Women's Theatre*. Interview

The most striking things are the form, content, and style of the performance. The improvisation-based acts full of music and movements, spontaneous dialogues, and references to daily life depict a range of subjects related to women, largely ignored in the male-dominated society. They present the issues they face in their daily life and try to resolve them in their way. They can express their emotions, they cry, scold, laugh, abuse, and whatever they face they act. They become heroes and punish the culprits whom anyway they cannot even look into their eyes in the broad light of reality. The excellence of the practice reflects in how artistically and mindfully they devise and express. During the performances, they explore various subjects of social discourse in their unique styles. With the changing time and ready to take on challenges, Phool Devi and others are desperate to mainstream their practices, which have started already. The hidden practices are now looking for wide attention and the artists want to get recognition for their practice to evolve their art further and present confidently. The characteristics of the participants are important in this regard. The women from every community participate but they organize it separately i.e. the women do this in their respective communities which means artists (women) are divided. That seems another confinement. Nevertheless, the participants from a mixed social status come together and theatre practice seems to be the main driving force.

Furthermore, the socio-cultural inter-linkages can be explored, women express in a male-dominated environment, however, confined; women perform in a scenario where existing contemporary theatre activities have difficulty in engaging women, owing to the theatre being portrayed as a vulgar gesture; many women are spearheading their families while men migrate for livelihood. Thus having more articulated communication will help them support their families. Overall, it will be a new learning for the society.

Unified Folk/Classical Theatre:

During the Vaishnava/Bhakti and allied reformist movements from 12th century CE onwards, various performing art forms were developed and become the most effective medium to connect, mobilise, and engage the people. Theatre practices in Mithila also got a new form, a kind of unified folk/classical form. Varnaratnakar mentions different folk performing art forms on the one hand and an elaborated classical theatre setting on the other, the writer Jyotirishwara is known for writing the earliest (found so far) Maithili (vernacular) farce, Dhurta Samagama Nataka, which dates back to early 14th century. Though, following the external invasion and political disturbances in India, the Sanskrit classical theatre and Sanskrit language were facing extinction, 'Mithila continued to cultivate it with all earnestness… Sanskrit dramatists in Mithila had taken a new turn from the earlier ones by introducing Sanskrit, Prakṛit, and Maithili in their dramatic creations of these three languages, Sanskrit, however, was the prominent one. The tri-lingual dramas played a very prominent part in integrating the Commons at large and also in developing the people's language.'[97] Gradually, Maithili started taking the center stage. 'Arising out of the devotion to Krishna the dramas were gradually secularised and vernacularised. The themes were generally taken out of the Puranic legends. Umapati, well-known for his play Parijata Harana based on the fight between Krishna and Indra over the Parijata tree (Bhagavata Purana), is credited to establish the tri-language theatre, called Kirtaniya Natya, based on the Puranic sources. The dramatic structure was based on Sanskrit classical theatre form having the Nayaka (hero), Nayika (heroine), Sakhi (friend), Narada (in different forms) and Vipata or Vidushaka formed the stack characters. The orchestra was

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[97] Hati, Somdatta. 2017. *Dhūrtasamāgama: A study.* International Journal of Academic Research and Development. Volume 2; Issue 5; September 2017. Page 1011

specially trained in the Nardiya forms of musical Kirtana.[98] The name 'Kirtaniya' is contested among the Maithil scholars, nevertheless, it was a kind of 'Bhasha Sangeetak' (a vernacular derivative of Sanskrit classical theatre), which initiated a unified theatre setting in which the playwright was the Sanskrit scholar and the performers were the folk artists.

The inclusion of folk performers was due to the severe resistance to theatre among the scholars' fraternity[99]. The handful of scholars, though restricted themselves only to writing the plays, ventured out for their creative urge and thus, a unification took place. Following the tradition, the later playwrights like the famous poet Vidyapati (plays - Gorakshavijaya, Manimanjari), Govinda (Nalacharitanataka), Ramadasa (Ananadavijayanataka), Devananda (Ushaharana), Ramapati (Rukminiharana), Lal Kavi (Gauriswayamvara), Nandipati (Krishnakelimala), and others contributed in further development.

Dhurtsamagam by Mailorang (source: National School of Drama

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[98] Chaudhary, Radhakrishna. 2010. *A suvey of Maithili Literature*. Pages 81, 107, 108 and 117.
[99] Malangia. Mahendra. 2009. *Maithili Loknatyak Vistrit Adhyayan evam Vishleshan.* Page 51.

The Kirtaniya tradition of Mithila flowed out to two other directions and kept inspiring each-other, the Ankia Natya of Assam and Upatyaka (Terai) Natya of Nepal. 'Both in Nepal and Assam, the drama became quite an important feature of literature (and cultural life). The influence of Maithili on the Assamese literature was profound… Samkardeva (1449-1586), the pioneer of Ankiya Natya wrote a number of Maithili dramas of which only six are extant, viz. Kaliyadamana, Ramavijaya or Sitasvayarm-vara, Rukminiharana, Keli-Gopala, Patniprasada, and Parijataharana… There is yet another belief that Samkaradeva visited Mithila and there he was influenced by the dramas of Umapati, Jyotirishwara, and Vidyapati.[100] Sankardeva developed Ankia Natya as part of the campaign for the Vaishnava Dharma, using the text from the Puranas and the tri-language- Assamese and Maithili in addition to Sanskrit.

Parijat Haran, directed by Kunal,
2006 (source: Bhaskar Jha)

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[100] Chaudhary, Radhakrishna. 2010. *A survey of Maithili Literature.* Pages 91 and 92.

The Upatyaka (Terai) Natya of Nepal: 'The Malla rulers were great patrons of arts and literature. The long association enabled the Maithil scholars to gain access to the court, where they introduced their vernacular songs in the Sanskrit dramas, staged during important occasions. Maithili exercised a great influence on the literature of Nepal. The Nepalese poets imitated Maithili in their compositions and there grew up the Sukumarasahitya or belles letters of Nepal… Vidyapati was a great force in Nepal and as a result of the patronage of Malla kings, Maithili occupied the place of court language there… Jayasthitimalla (1318-1394) was the greatest patron of dramatic art in Nepal and the earliest Sanskrit drama is believed to have been written in his reign, wrote his famous dramas, Muditakuvalayaswa (l628), a very valuable source-book for the history of the Malla kings of Nepal, Haragaurivivaha (1629) and Kunjabiharinataka. The last one is a dramatisation of the events from the life of Krishna, Radha. and Gopis. His grandson, Jagataprakashamalla, raised Maithili to the pinnacle of glory in Nepal. Jagataprakashamalla himself contributed by writing devotional songs and dramas. Ushaharana, Naliyanataka, Parijataharana, Prabhapatiharana, and Madancharita are attributed to Jagataprakashamalla. Later, the reign of King Ranjitamalla (1722-1772) marked the zenith of the Maithili drama in Nepal. The patronization continued with later kings who carried on the tradition.[101] There was another drama performance 'Kartik Nach' being performed until recently, which had a similar format like Kirtaniya with the addition of the use of masks. Jagdish Chandra Mathur in his Paramparasheel Natya quotes, 'King Harisinghdev was the pioneer of the styles of Bhasha Sangeetak in Mithila and Nepal. Until recently, these theatre performances are known as the names of Kirtaniya Nach in Mithila and Kartik Nach in Nepal'.[102] The references of Kirtaniya Nach are also mentioned in

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[101] Chaudhary, Radhakrishna. 2010. *A survey of Maithili Literature.* Pages 80, 81, and 83.
[102] Mathur, Jagdishchandra. *Paramaparasheel Natya*. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan. Page 16.

different works of the famous writer Phanishwar Nath Renu, including in 'Raspriya'.

Parijat Haran, directed by Kunal, 2006 (source: Bhaskar Jha)

Another similar form Vidapat (popular in eastern Mithila) also has a similar dramatic structure and acting style of Ankiya and Kirtaniya, which comprises the Puranic stories, Padavali (poetry) of Vidyapati (1360-1450), and the dance-music initiated by Jaydev (1170-1245) in his 'Geet-Govind'. Francis Bukanun in his book 'An Account of the District of Purnea in 1809-10' quotes the influence of 'Geet-Govind' on Vidapat such as the singing pattern of Ashtpadi (a song of eight verses)

and the dancing pattern of Raas.[103] The name 'Vidapat' is again contested among the scholars, some believe it as the reminiscence of Kirtania, others find it as an original form named after Vidyapati, while some others connect it with the form 'Vidaot' mentioned in Varnaratnakar. Nevertheless, the form itself has undergone various transformations and come out as a unique form of theatre. It is usually performed on the occasions of social gatherings like rituals, festivals, and marriage ceremonies. A Mandli (Performing group) headed by the Mulgain (the director, manager, instructor, and Guru of the group) consists of 10 artists including Natua (dancers), Mulgain (Master), Vikta (Comedian), 'Gawaiya' (assistant singers) and Samaji (instrument players). The 'Rangsthali' (stage) is normally designed with three sides open sitting. The play starts with 'Purvarang' which is followed by Sumirana, Guruvandana, and Bhagwati Vandana. It then proceeds to the long dialogue session between Vikta and Mulgain in which Vikta represents the audience and asks questions to Mulgain. They establish the relation of performance with the occasion and content of the play with the audience by discussing its relevance to the present situation. Then the main plot of the story begins. They use all forms e.g. prose, poetry, and songs of the Maithili language, also the Sanskrit verses and mantras. The tradition of Vidapat is near extinct. Perhaps Amarnath Mandal and Group of Purnia is the only existing theatre group performing Vidapat.

The foundation of Kirtaniya theatre and allied forms lies in the essence of Sangeetak (and folk theatre), the ones mentioned in Varnaratnakar as Thamran, Chenga, Chaupai, Venu, etc. Kirtaniya remained at the forefront side-by-side with the Nach, the former being patronized by the kings whereas the latter supported by the community prevailed ever till the date. Kirtania itself had two streams, one that

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[103] Buchanan, Francis. 1928. *An Account of the District of Purnea in 1809-10*. Patna: Bihar and Orissa Research Society. Pages 516-517

was for the scholarly or elite audience and the other for the common mass, that is why 'the former is sophisticated and formal, whereas the latter is more natural, easy, intelligible, simple, direct, and informal'.[104] Besides the effect of changing political situation under British rule, the commercial success of Parsi theatre in the mid-19th century onwards spread the new taste, pattern, content, or performance style of theatre, and influenced the existing practices of theatre all over the country. Later on, Nautanki and other folk theatre forms inspired by Parsi theatre re-designed their formats and gradually became quite popular, including Nach in Mithila. Later in the early 20th century, Bhikhari Thakur (1887-1971) changed the entire theatre discourse with his popular works in the Bhojpuri language like Bidesia (the play itself became the name of his form),[105] Gabarghichor, Beti-Bechwa, Bhai Birodh, and so many more. Bidesia portrays the life of a migrant worker and the plight of his wife who he leaves behind and migrates to Kolkata for a livelihood. The story revolves around the desperate wife and her struggle. The play discusses the aspects of migration. Bhikhari Thakur somehow became the voice of the deprived and marginalised masses who were struggling for their life and dealing with the fast-changing world around them.

Bhikhari Thakur (source: Wikipedia)

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[104] Mishra, Jayakanta. 1949. *A History of Maithili Literature*. Page 358.
[105] Malangia Mahendra. 2009. *Maithili Loknatyak Vistrit Adhyayan evam Vishleshan.* Pages 67, 68, and 70.

Perspective on the Practice

This unified folk/classical theatre has had unique structural development, aesthetics, longevity, performance elements, and cultural impact on the region. The Vaishnav/Bhakti and allied movements got the artistic leverage to reach new heights, including various music, dance, and drama forms like Ankia Nat, Kirtaniya Nat, Jatra, Raas, etc. The aesthetical approach of these forms facilitated the social, mythological, and artistic advancement of its practitioners and viewers. 'These dramas served a great purpose for the common mass. Through these dramas, all ideas were brought to the level of the masses. The drama represented the people's culture…prevalent customs of Maithil life and culture…Vaishnavism took its place alongside Saivism…Females did not take part and their roles were impersonated by male actors There was no caste restriction in the choice of actors but some minimum qualifications like singing and gesticulations were required before one could be allowed to join a Jamait (group)… There are matters of religious experiences, philosophical reflections on the world and morality, poignant introspection of the self, self- anguish, and yearning for illumination in some of these dramas… They have both a sensuous and intellectual appeal'.[106] The synthesis of a whole theatre scenario which later became the great tradition of creativity has still preserved its heritage as a core of cultural life. A creative platform where various arts forms streams mingled and created a new way of expression. This unification also shows an exchange between two different thoughts of Lok (folk) and Shastra (classical) that reflects in its formation, development, and presentation. It has always been enriched by different classical and folk arts but somehow maintained its unique identity. It also depicts the democratization of arts that could be seen in the active participation of the folk

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[106] Chaudhary, Radhakrishna. 2010. *A survey of Maithili Literature.* Pages 107 and 116-118.

artists from the lower community (and Muslims, later) who were illiterate, and had no advanced knowledge of the grammar of theatre. In contrast, almost all the playwrights were usually Brahman and Sanskrit scholars while the language used was Maithili, Magadhi Prakrit as well as Sanskrit. The participation of the audience who were not merely the passive onlooker but active participants in the enactment and the whole process as well.

Contemporary Theatre

The term 'contemporary' refers to the present context of Maithil life and its theatre arts. It also discusses the new waves and patterns of artistic expression. The two sections 'Elemental Folk' and 'Modern hybrid' discuss the two aspects, first, the revival of the traditional theatre with a modern lens or simply presenting the relevant concept or content with the help of folk elements. Second, the inclusion and influence of modern Indian theatre as well as world theatre, on both the content and form. These two sections have been complementary and supplementary to each-other.

The revival or re-interpretation of traditional (folk/classical) theatre got a leap forward through the works of orientalists, linguists, and anthropologists. The contribution of George Abraham Grierson, an Irish administrator, philologist, and linguist is very important in this regard. 'Besides his writings like 'The Maithili Literature of North Bihar, Chrestomathy and Vocabulary', 'The peasant life of Bihar', Grierson published Manabodha's Krishnajanma (Harivamsa Ka Gita), Nebar ka Gita, various Vaishnava hymns, Purushapariksha of Vidyapati, Dinabhadri ka Gita (folklore of Dinabhadri), etc. Interestingly, throughout the fall of Kirtania and the new advent of scholarly pursuits, the folk theatre (Nach) remained vital among the lower communities and even reached its grandeur. In the introduction of 'Ath Geet Raja Salhesak' (the folklore of Salhes), Grierson mentions "It (the song of Raja Salhes) is most popular throughout the district amongst the low caste people and is printed word for word taken down from the mouth of a Dom. Salhes was the first Chaukidar and is much worshiped by Dusadh, a caste (community) whose profession is to steal and to act as Chaukidars, preferably the former. Throughout Tirhut, Salhes Asthans can be seen under the

village pipal tree, composed of a raised mud platform surmounted by mounted figures made of clay, representing the various characters of the song."[107] The beginning of the modern period is considered in the mid-19th century with the works of Chanda Jha along with the works of Raghunandan Das, Lal Das, and others. Mithila Natak is a very important contribution of Chanda Jha, greatly influenced by the new awakening. In his introduction, he says that the Nataka depicts the evil of the present-day Mithila through allegorical characters and contrasts it with her glorious past. He wrote a Kirtaniya drama entitled "Ahalyacharitanataka" and translated the plays like Uttararamacharita and Purushapariksha into Maithili.

Another milestone in this direction was the works by Manipadm (Raja Salhes, 1973 and Anang Kusma, 1999). These two Mahakavya (epics) had a transforming effect on the perspective of the scholars towards folklores. Afterward, many other playwrights and scholars followed the revivalist approaches like Mahendra Narayan Ram documented most of the folklore performances whereas theatre practitioners translated them into spectacular performances, for example, the works of Kunal, a playwright-director who developed a range of performances, presented the original Kirtaniya plays like Parijat Haran (playwright: Umapati), as well as applied the form of Kirtaniya to the plays like Rukmini Haran (playwright: Govind Jha), Seetayan (playwright: Somdev), Lorikayan (playwright: Kumar Shailendra), Kusma Salhes, Bidapat, Gyan Jhak Khissa, and others. The application of folk/traditional elements in a modern setting of theatre has been a prominent feature all over India, including Habib Tanvir (Charandas Chor), Ratan Thiyam (Chakravyuha), Shanta Gandhi (Jasma Odan), Vijay Tendulkar -playwright/Jabbar

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[107] *Ath Geet Raja Salhesak*. 4 December 2018. Webpage. Accessed 20 October 2020. www.sahapedia.org

Patel-director (Ghasiram Kotwal), Kavalam Narayana Panicker (Sankrit classical plays), to name a few. This very feature of the modern theatre was a blend of classical and/or folk with modern sensibilities. Mithila has continued devising its theatre, around new ideas with its time-tested traditions, which reflected in important plays like Ugna Re Mor Katay Gela (Usha Kiran Khan), Raja Salhes (Mahendra Malangia), Gorakhdhandha (Kashyap Kamal- playwright/Abhishek Dev Narayan- Designer/Director), and so on.

Gorakhdhandha by Achhinjal
(source: Abhishek Dev Narayan)

The modern hybrid format was developed with the foremost effect of realistic styles and that dealt with more critical or radical themes. The folk/traditional theatre portrayed the events related to gods/goddesses/heroes/deities along with a significant depiction of people's life, whereas the modern theatre practitioners brought the human/social life at the forefront. There are many promising playwrights, directors, and theatre teams who have been doing their best with

minimal resources and in a challenging situation for theatre. Some of the prominent playwrights include Sudhanshu Shekhar Chaudhary, his plays 'Bhafait Chahak Jingi', 'Belak Maaral', 'Letait Anchar' and others talk about the issues of unemployment, dowry, generation gap, etc. Govind Jha in his plays 'Basaat' and 'Antim Pranam' raises a social discussion whereas Gunnath Jha through Kania Putra and Pathey discusses the rural-urban divide. Nachiketa is known for his experimental plays and psychological treatment like 'Ek Chhal Raja' discusses the conflicts between Bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Arvind Akku in his 'Anhar Jungle' does a symbolic analysis of anomalies of the social fabric[108] whereas Rambharos Kapadi 'Bhramar'in his play 'Suli par Ijot'discusses the social absurdity and Kuman Gagan through his play 'Koili Binu Bagia Udas' raises voice for women rights. One of the most influential in this league of modern creators is Mahendra Malangia, a folklorist, playwright, and director. In his 35 or more one-act play/full-length plays, 'Okra Angnak Barahmasa', 'Juwayal Kankani', 'Kathak Lok', 'Original Kaam', 'Nasbandi', 'Lakshman Rekha Khandit', Vilaap, Sunite Kare Haran (Panch Patr) are some of those plays that have reached to every nook and corner of Mithila and remained popular among people till date. He has worked on realism in Maithili Play-writing following three unities- time, space, and action, and tried to depict the Commons' life through various social themes and conflicts with a rational approach. The diversity in theatre language while breaking the elite standardisation of Maithili language and bringing common's language in the mainstream, is one of his major contributions. Plays like Barahmasa (The twelve months), the poetic depiction of a highly marginalised and devastated rural family and their life all around the year, representing the people from lower strata and the endless exploitation of landlords, is his magnum opus.

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[108] Mishra, Jayakanta. 1988. *Maithili Scene: Drama Forges Ahead.* Page 54

Sunite Kare Haran (Panch Patr) and Buddhimati Ki Bhains by Achhinjal (source: Abhishek Dev Narayan)

Perspective on the Practice

The contemporary theatre whether modern hybrid or elemental folk is largely based on the critical or radical themes in which human and social life has been at the forefront. There are multiple works and ongoing efforts in this direction. Many playwrights advocate the oppressed and disadvantaged wings of society, Malangia is one of them. 'The early modern Maithili theatre practitioners initiated a theatre for upper castes in a polished (said to be cultured) version of Maithili language…the lower castes carried on with folk theatre, their own gods, people and language (rooted Maithili). Ironically, there was no way of mingling the two streams of theatre… He (Malangia) was one of the pioneering men (practitioners), who took the oath to change the discourse by creating dialogues between the two opposite sections of society… Malangia has crafted this magic in which (even) the sons of oppressors portray the sons of oppressed with genuine feelings and in their alleged crude or uncivilised language… The effective combination of realistic themes and styles with indigenous taste illustrates the untouched subjects such as

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the life of the underprivileged, human relationship, contemporary picture of rural and semi-urban life, outstanding story design and dialogue, and a theatre of all three generations in terms of aesthetics, thought process and presentation style. The standard of creation and entertainment at the least resources develop low-cost theatre, a demand of time and situation.[109] Malangia's plays are known for the characterisation, development of conflict, humour, the inclusion of all the varieties of language, and overall presentation which catch hold of the spectators. All these progressive theatre practitioners have established a collective based on critical consciousness, through a new sense of aesthetics and still carrying on with a diverse form of moral, psychological, and social discourse.

Theatre in Mithila has seen a paradigm shift. The ancient folk tradition helped in the foundation of the medieval unified folk-classical form and after its downfall, rejuvenated the dying theatre tradition, and did hand-hold the development of modern theatre. The core element of this critical consciousness in the society of Mithila is the Commons, who have been the bearer of the culture. The indigenousness is found throughout the history of theatre arts and other cultural practices. At the end of the day, Mithila comes up as a rooted society no matter how much the alleged civilised section of the society discards the essence of folk or ignores the value of ingenuousness. This debate of theatre brings forth the aspects of resilience, perseverance, and critical consciousness embedded in the life of Mithila. The modern theatrical sensibility is on the one hand engrossed with the aesthetics of theatre in its natural and indigenous form, the Nach, and on the other hand, it is continuously becoming critical, radical, and sensitive towards human and social values. Though, the challenge for sustainability is certainly a big

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[109] Kumar, Abhishek. 2009. *The Shakespeare of Dalit*. Sajag. IFP India, January-March 2009. Accessed 25 October 2020.

challenge before the theatre practitioners and the society, the sustained efforts being made by the practitioners and promoters present the ray of hope. Theatre arts is going through different changes throughout the world in terms of content, style and perspective, Maithili theatre needs to respond to the need of the hours.

Women's Theatre Act 'Mithirang Tarang' at Meghdoot, Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi, 2018

Chapter 5

Triad of Nature, Human & Divine (Visual Expressions)

A discussion around the creation of the universe, the supreme creator, and the creator-creation relationship is wide-spread in every culture. It goes further to understanding the inter-connectedness between oneself and the ultimate self. The dimensions of the universe – 'the psychic-spiritual dimension as well as a physical-material dimension…humans have also described the interplay between the spiritual and material aspects of the universe including the presence of the divine within the physical world… a spirituality experiences itself as supported by both the spiritual and the physical dynamics of the cosmic-earth processes, and brings the human, the other-than-human and the divine into a communion that permits us to discover ourselves in the universe just as the universe discovers itself in us'.[110] The communion – triad of nature, human and divine is found in the visual and musical traditions in Mithila. Here, 'nature' refers to the entities/objects other-than-human whereas 'divine' refers to the imperceptible supreme force. Though these traditions have a huge repertoire of work, the study has focused on those expressions which portray the interconnection between nature, human and divine, through various process of encoding, decoding, and the creation of symbols. For example- in Tantrik painting, the artistic depiction in painting (Chitra) decodes the lingual depiction (Beej Mantra and Mantroddhar) of the knowledge devised by the visionary (*Drushta*) in line with the geometrical interpretation (Yantra and

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[110] O'Hara, Dennis Patrick. 2015. *Thomas Berry's Understanding of the Psychic- Spiritual Dimension of Creation: Some sources*. To Live in a Cosmos: The Intellectual Roots of Thomas Berry. Accessed 24 March 2021. www.researchgate.net

Yantroddhar). Similarly, Aripan and Kohbar are also made through decoding the attributes of nature and the divine and their relationship with human and expressed as works of art. Similar expressions can also be seen in the sculptures depicting human, animal, nature, or abstract forms, made in Sikki grass weaving, pottery, Sujni embroidery, and different carving art including those found in the architectural works. Various forms of the folk and traditional music have a line of thought and expression based on the triad as well. Both in visual and musical expressions, the human emotions, thoughts, social living and the psychic-spiritual exploration of the divine are illustrated through the symbols derived from nature - its elements, attributes, objects and phenomena. These constituents of nature embody various aspects of human life and represent that through a nature's language.

Structure of the Practice

Visual expressions can be seen in five different types of arts and artefacts. Based on the magnitude of practice, it can broadly be categorised into Painting, Carving Art, Pottery, Sikki Grass Weaving, and Sujni Embroidery. The variety of work can also be understood in terms of motifs, forms, styles, contents, and applications. Painting, Sikki, and Sujni works are mostly led by women artists whereas Pottery and other carving arts are the combined works by both men and women. There are various aspects of creativity or artistic expression of life and other socio-cultural facets like livelihood, custom, community connections, etc. attached with the practices. Some of these works are created in connection to particular occasions like rituals or festivals or for a certain utility or decoration whereas there are

various examples of free artistic expressions related to folklore or epics or contemporary issues, etc.

In several works, one can see the artistic brilliance, craftily perfection, analytical interpretation, thoughtful ideation, and abstraction. Most of these works share common cultural, mythological, or philosophical content related to human life while interpreting the divine based on inspiration from nature. It is difficult to find the historiography of these practices. Few people try to find the traces in epics like connecting Mithila painting to the time of marriage of Ram and Sita. There are other local stories related to a certain practice or historical references of adoption

of a particular skill through inter-cultural exchanges. However, such wonderful art-works can not be just initiated on a particular day. It must be evolved in the centuries of human practice. The pre-historic cave paintings of Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh) or ISKO, Hazaribagh (Jharkhand) are the early examples of murals depicting human-social life using various abstract patterns or everyday life objects and activities. The current mural art practiced across the communities may have a close bonding with that, however, it is a subject of further research. Particular caste identity has also been attached to a particular practice, for example, painting in Mithila is categorised in terms of certain caste.[111] The origin and evolution of these practices are because of the collective human efforts, however, the later development was centered or restricted to certain community or caste due to various social-political reasons. That is why similar tradition is found across a certain region/s, though the engagement with the practice varies.

Eminent artist Ishwari Gupta
(Source: Prateek Prabhakar)

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[111] *Madhubani Chitrakala Ek Kalaakaar ki Drishti Men*. FolkBrain. Accessed 21 March 2021. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zqp9h0K23WA&list=WL&index=24

Gender has also a role to play in the artistic/cultural practices of Mithila. Women from the upper caste were not allowed to go out for work or even express themselves publicly. The women from the lower caste were though free to go out but had to work for the landlords and upper-class families. These arts works not only became the source of livelihood for the women but the strong means of expression and personal-social-spiritual quest. Most of the arts forms particularly the visual arts have been shaped and developed by women. Besides they have also been equal participants in various practices led by men, especially the art-works with hard material.

Tazia and Sifar from Bhagalpur and Madhubani (Source: Jagran.com and livehindustan.com)

Mahaviri Jhanda from Sitamadhi (Source: beforeprint.in, hi-in, facebook)

A range of art-works of pottery and Papier Mache as well as the carving art using various mediums like Wood, Bamboo, Cane, Stone, Metal, Brick, Paper, Plastic, Thermocol, Lac, Glass, etc. are wide-spread in Mithila and other parts of Bihar as

well as Terai Nepal. Many of them are also used in various architectural Works in temples or other monuments as well as on several auspicious occasions and usually in everyday life. The following image shows an illustrative map of visual arts forms from Bihar including Mithila.

Ashoka Pillar & Stupa – Vaishali, Kali Mandir - Madhubani (Source: www.vaishali.nic.in, thinkingparticle, outlook)   Mandap Art (Source: alamy.com) & Indra Puja Idols (Source: public.app)

Pottery and Ceramic – Darbhanga (Source: Pawan Kumar Jha & UMSAS)   Artist Kuraisa from Majhaulia, Muzaffarpur (Source: blog.worldbank.org)

Silver works – Bhagalpur, Bamboo Works Samastipur, Bamboo plant Koshi region , Metal Craft –Vaishali , Sikki- Madhubani (Source: biharfoundation, thebeehiveindia.com , budgetyatri, UMSAS)

(Manjusha, Mithila, Patna Kalam, Tikuli Art (Patna) and Wood and Stone Craft (Gaya) Source: UMSAS and others)

Sujni Embroidery – Muzaffarpur, Jute works - Katihar, Applique and Kashida - Arrah (Source: UMSAS)   Babarbuti weaving - Nalanda, Papier Mache - Madhubani, Hand block print- Nalanda (Source: picuki.com, asiainch.org, UMSAS)

Sikki Hand-weaving

Sikki grass is also known as golden grass. It is mostly found growing in wet and marshy areas (Chaur) of Bihar, Uttarpradesh, and Terai Nepal. Sikki is obtained from the dried stem of a succulent plant 'Katra', a wild variety. It is cut from near its base and then dried, after which the upper portion of the flowering stem is discarded. The remaining portion is finely sliced and shaved and used for making the products. The common long grass called Khar (plant: Sabe) is coiled along with the thin iron wire and stitched together with the Sikki, using a six-inch-long needle-shaped iron object called Takua with a rounded head, made of lac or wood, which is used to grip the needle while coiling the grass. The object being made is held firmly, while the right hand is completely free to wield the Takua. Other tools used in the process are knife, scissor, and pliers. Sikki grass, which is characterised by its wonderful golden hue, is also dyed into myriad shades of various colours to make the products more attractive. It is then shaped into a variety of articles such as baskets and boxes, human figures, replicas of gods and goddesses, toys, animals, birds, models of chariots and temples, and many more. Like the paintings, Sikki is also a traditional folk art and has been originated and kept alive through the local social custom such as marriages and other auspicious occasions. Sikki grass grows wild near water bodies like ponds or puddles immediately after the monsoon season. The best time for its growth and abundant availability is the consecutive three months post-July. The seller generally stores and sells it until April. The processing of grass is normally done according to the needs of the market.

Sikki Sculpture 'Devi' (Source: JIYO Project)

This grass becomes the raw material for women from different communities to engage in creative as well as livelihood activities, especially in the Madhubani, Sitamadhi, and Darbhanga districts of Bihar.[112] The technique used for making products from Sikki is the ancient and time-honoured coiling method. Interestingly, the actual form is shaped with munj, Khar (raffia grass), which is much cheaper and more abundant. This provides the basic shape and gives additional strength to the product. There are no specific knots in Sikki -making. Sometimes threads, cords, or other materials are used to bind the edges. The Sikki is lightly dabbed with water to make it more pliable as it is coiled around the Munj. It is coloured by boiling it in dyes until the desired shade is achieved. Colours are bought from the local market, where they are sold in powder or pellet form, earlier

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[112] *Sikki Grass Craft*. Upendra Maharathi Shilp Anusandhan Sansthan. Accessed 15 March 2021. Umsag.org.in

as vegetable dyes but now replaced by chemical dyes. The most popularly used colours are purple, deep blue, bright yellow, magenta pink, green and red–all of them combined with the natural golden to make the final product- a complete orchestra of colours.

Sikki processes (Source: Abhishek Dev Narayan)

Crafting Sikki products involves not only dexterity of the hand, but also a creative impulse of the mind, manifested in superlative forms and the dramatic play of colours. Each product is a personalized expression. Innovation is rife. A brightly coloured paperweight turns out to be grass coiled around a stone.[113] An open-faced fruit bowl can be converted into the base for a narrow-necked, broad-based jug. Considered auspicious, Sikki is woven to craft objects of religious significance like figures of deities for religious festivals. For instance, Salhesh Pooja, the festival celebrated by the Dusadh Dalit community in Bihar, involves items made dominantly of Sikki. Stemming from this practice, the products fashioned from this grass were also traditionally, and continue to be closely connected with marriage ceremonies. Besides, some of the new-generation artists and designers have

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[113] Narayan, Abhishek Dev. 2011. *Beyond the Clichés.* Accessed 15 March 202. www.goldsmiths.academia.edu/httpswwwlinkedincominabhishekkumar0103281b

experimented with this art with a different perspective. Some of the well-known artists of this art include Bindeshwari Devi, Kumudani Devi, Kameshwar Thakur, Munni Devi, Sudhira Devi[114], Dhirendra Kumar, to name a few. Connoisseurs like Upendra Maharathi, Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, V.G.Srinivasan, Rajeev Sethi, and the designers like Amitrasudan Saha, Pawan Kumar Jha, and others have worked alongside these artists. The permanent collections of some of their works can be seen at different museums and institutions including Crafts Museum (Delhi), Upendra Maharathi Shilp Anusandhan Sansthan (Patna) or Bihar Museum (Patna) as well as National Museum of Natural History (Washington D.C) and Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design (New York). Today this age-old traditional craft faces a major obstacle that prevents its widespread use – its susceptibility to degradation. This hindrance to the applicability of Sikki grass is further coupled with threats from mass and mill-produced plastic and synthetic items, in which consumers find a cheap and more durable alternative. Besides all these challenges, many artists are practicing the craft who include the artists from the villages Raiyaam (Madhubani) and Sursand (Sitamadhi).

Village Life – Sikki on Canvas (Source: alkarts.com)

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[114] *Munni: The Artist of Golden Grass*. Accessed 15 March 2021.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=DE_FklhM2pA

Like other forms of arts in Mithila, Sikki is deep-rooted in tradition and everyday life. Besides the ceremonial and ritualistic values associated with it, some of the artists, especially the artists from Raima like Kameshwar Thakur and others went beyond the existing practice to depict their spiritual sensibilities through this golden grass, working on the concepts like Das Mahavidya - the major aspect of Tantrik discourse as well as Ardhnarishwar, and the Panchdev - Surya, Ganesh, Durga, Mahadev, and Agni. The use of colour, texture, shape, and size adds various dimensions to their interpretation of these concepts.

Sikki Craft Products (Source: Abhishek Dev Narayan)

Sikki New Designs (Source: Abhishek Dev Narayan)

Sujni Embroidery

Traditionally Sujni is a special patched quilt made by recycling a number of worn-out saris and dhotis together in a simple running stitch that gives it a new structure while ornamenting it. It is sometimes stitched in white and sometimes in colour threads drawn from borders of saris. 'This technique which involves stitching together pieces of old fabric has a belief system behind it. The cloth, bound together by Sujani served a ritual function. It invoked Chitriya Ma, the lady of the tatters. In it is enshrined the holistic Indian concept that all parts belong to the whole and must return to it. 'Su' means facilitating and 'Jani' means birth. It is used to wrap a newborn baby. It is also preferred because old cloth is softer and feels closest to a mother's womb.'[115] A new cloth is considered to be harsh on its skin. The term Sujni reflects the above-mentioned functional nature of this practice. A woman would be attributed as a *Sugrahini*, if she recycled the used cloth and make it into new, to be meant for not just her children, but grandchildren as well.

Sujni Embroidery (Source: Abhishek Dev Narayan)

[115] Setlur, Agnisesh. *Forum – Swati Kalsi*. Accessed 17 March 2021. www.lopezdesign.com

Sujni is common to Bihar, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, and parts of Uttar Pradesh. North Bihar especially Muzaffarpur has had long and sustained practice. Though Kantha of Bengal is similar to Sujni, there is a world of difference between the two. In both cases, the stitches include straight as well as curvilinear running lines. Another difference is that Sujni embroidery often involves the outlining of motifs with a chain stitch in black or dark colours while Kantha motifs are outlined with running stitch.[116] The artists outline and fill in motifs with coloured quilting stitches and fill the background with white stitching. The densely worked quilting in a circular manner to fill motifs creates a dimensional distortion that gives these quilts a unique surface character. The running stitches according to their density, not only produce different colour values, but together with a particular texture of the surface, they give a tonality of their own to each Sujni. Moreover, they are conducted so as to produce an effect of modelling of its own kind. This quilted surface is embellished with folk-style motifs taken from their surroundings and is simple and bold. Initially, their designs depicted the daily rhythms of their own lives and their surroundings: trees, animals, and birds. Besides, Sujni has vivid geometric patterns and motifs too. These motifs and patterns became purposeful and ritualistic creations, for example, one could find sun and cloud motifs signifying life-giving forces, fertility symbols, animal and bird motifs, and fantastic winged animals for protection against destructive forces, and motifs to attract the blessings of their gods. Different coloured threads were also contextually used, such as red, signifying blood, a life force, and yellow for the sun. Increasingly, Sujni designs are beginning to express social and political themes. The overall effect of the pattern is very abstract and the figure drawing relates with other art forms of the region. The embroidery tradition presents the

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[116] Jha, Banhi. *Sujni Embroidery and Community of Practice*. 2019. IASDR. Accessed 15 March 2021. www.Iasdr2019.org

genius of exceptional women who, for well over a century, have created distinctive works of art for their homes and families. The community of women embroiderers of this region are the inheritors of a tradition that undoubtedly goes back many generations, though the earliest examples of their community's craft are lost.[117]

The process Sujni Designs (Source: Abhishek Dev Narayan) of making

Sujni Process and Tool (Source: Abhishek Dev Narayan)

Sujni follows a set of activities. Drawing and Tracing are done to outline the design on the cloth. Stories, compositions, and colour combinations are worked out by the artists on their own. The background is filled with the fine running stitch with thread whose colour is similar to the background. It gives a wavy effect. Chain stitch usually in the black, brown, and red thread is done for the main outline

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[117] Kumar, Abhishek. 2015. *Assessing the impact of JIYO! Project: Sustainable Livelihood for Sujni Artisans in Muzaffarpur (Bihar)*. Delhi: Asian Heritage Foundation

of the motif, and the design is then filled with running stitch in coloured threads. Sujni embroidery is very simple but requires a lot of patience and time. The smaller items can be made individually and to make large bed sheets or quilts, three or four women work together, starting from different ends approaching the centre. At the end, extra threads or knots are cut from the edges to give it better Finishing. Finally, Washing and Calendaring are done. The artisans make bed-sheet, cushion cover, wall hanging, sari, dupatta, suit, top, kurta pajama, shirt, and bag. Sujni products are used for decorative as well as utilitarian purposes. Raw Material and Tool use in this process varies according to the availability, quality, and transportation facilities. Cotton or Markeen is used as the base of the embroidery whereas thread like Moon Thread is used for background filling. Rangoli or Anchor Thread is used for filling the motif and the outline of the motif. Generally, Sujni is made on recycled old fabrics which is readily available in most households. Tools like a needle, frame for tightening the cloth, scissors, measurement tape are used throughout the process.

Sujni Designs (Source: thehindu.com)   Sujni New Design (Source: swatikalsi.com)

In recent years, the structure and practice of Sujni have been changed. The fabric, design, the content from everyday life, nature, or mythology to the modern issues like female infanticide, election violence, education of girls, scenes of domestic

abuses or images of women struggling for their rights, etc. Nirmala Devi is a pioneering Sujni artist among other important contributors like Sanju Devi[118]. Having faced a great deal of challenges, these artists have stood out against all odds. Practitioners from many villages including Bhusra, Ramnagar, Dhanaur, Gharbhara, and Sarfuddinpur of Muzaffarpur have been recognised and developed through distinct learning of contemporary designs, colour combinations, and diversified product range. Some of the important contributors to this journey of Sujni include the pioneering V. G. Srinivasan, the organisation ADITHI, Rajeev Sethi, Swati Kalsi (JIYO, Asian Heritage Foundation), Busra Mahila Vikas Samiti etc. Efforts have continuously been made by government and civil society organisations for its development. But in a fast-growing mechanized world full of fast mass-production and ever-changing consumer choices, these hand skills, representative of these women's identities, are facing multiple challenges. The factors promoting this change are varied – poverty, mass migrations and displacements due to natural calamities escalating costs of raw materials, and the pressures of existence. Some designers and the apparel industry have also ventured in this direction. However, a lot is required to make it sustained and kept in the mainstream.

Sujni is presently approached as a relief to needy women/artists as it provides them with some economic and emotional support. It also provides them with a platform to discuss their problems and also exposes them to the outer world. Younger girls are trying to use this as a source of educating and liberating themselves. The voice of Nirmala Devi[119] echoes the changes caused by Sujni work in the lives of women - '…(Earlier) women rarely used to go out of their homes, men and women did not

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[118] Balasubramaniam, Chitra. 2019. *Sujni, equally elegant twin of Kantha*. Accessed 15 March 2021. www.thehindu.com
[119] Narayan, Abhishek Dev. 2011. *Beyond the Clichés.* Accessed 15 March 202.

interact at all. Now, because we work we move around much more. Women speak to men and nobody thinks ill of us... How the men used to drink! And none of us could speak out about it. It's different now my husband listens to me. He started drinking less because I reasoned with him and made him see how it was harming all of us... I have my own money. I can buy what I want without asking his permission... Who cared about us village women in the old days? But now that we make these embroideries, people come all the way from America to see our work and speak with us…'' It is astonishing to see 'how needle-work embroidery has become a woman's expression of identity- working with thread is a way of life and way of expression for people with dextrous hands···how fabrics used in different places tell us about their geo-climatic conditions. The techniques speak of the level of civilization. The motifs tell us about their legends and myths, beliefs, and also their way of life. Embroidery created by women is all this and yet, more. Embroidery is fundamental to the women, as an emblem.'[120]

(Source: Abhishek Kumar)

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[120] Setlur, Agnisesh. *Forum – Swati Kalsi*. Accessed 17 March 2021

Painting

The tradition of painting from the region is much talked about and widely discussed all across the world. Mithila or Madhubani and Manjusha from the north of Ganges whereas Patna Kalam and Tikuli from the South are the forms of painting and mural art. The former two painting forms share similar form, content, and style, partially discussed in the previous section on folklore. They can be seen as sister art forms or just the same tradition. Mithila painting has got recognition in India and all over the world, somehow becomes the identity of the region. The origin of this tradition has different beliefs connected with it like the first public installation in the marriage ceremony of Ram and Sita of the epic Ramayana or certain references of its antiquity dates back to the 14th century. The tradition of paintings on paper or other modern media has roots in mural art or floor art. The cave paintings may be the earliest reference in this regard, however, it is a matter of research. The below images are of cave paintings and murals from Bihar and Jharkhand. These works of arts are spanned over 10000 years, exist in the same region.
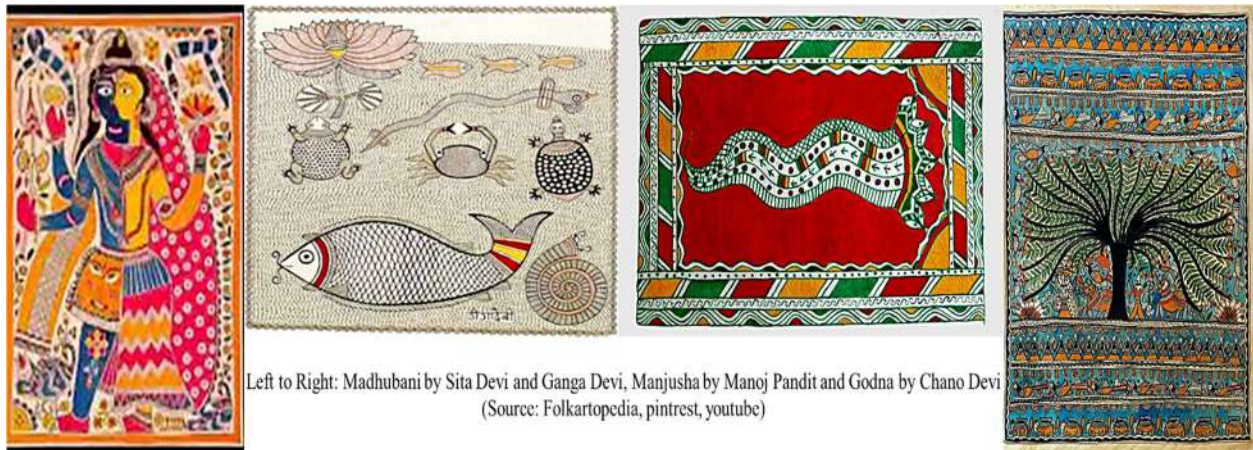

Cave paintings- Hazaribagh, Khovar – Hazaribagh, Mud Murals – Purnia, Mural- Madhubani (Source: Factfold, Focus Magazine, Folkartopedia, Alamy)

The first written and pictorial documentation was done by the British officer and ethnographer William G. Archer in his 1949 article in the Indian art journal, Marg. He took photographs of the murals in the 1930s. Later in the 1960s, with the intervention of All India Handicrafts Board (then Director- Pupul Jayakar), encouraged a few upper caste women in villages around Madhubani town to start transferring their ritual wall paintings (usually in two different styles of 'line painting'- Kachni and 'Colour painting'-Bharni) to paper as an income-generating project…Later in 1970s, the Dalit women of the region started working on paper applying compositions and figures based on traditional tattoo patterns called Godna. It was the almost same period when the ancient Manjusha painting practiced around the Bhagalpur town was also brought to the forefront. Mithila had long been famous in India for its rich culture and numerous poets, scholars, and theologians - mostly the men from affluent communities. For women, it has been a deeply conservative society, (they) were confined to their homes and limited to household chores, child-rearing, managing family rituals, and ritual wall painting. Painting on paper for sale has changed this dramatically…Aside from generating important new family income, individual women have gained local, national, and even international recognition. Artists are being invited to exhibitions across India, and to Europe, the United States, and Japan…Gender relations are shifting. A few men continue to paint within what is still defined as "a women's tradition,"… These changes have provoked an argument in Mithila and beyond between cultural conservatives who claim that commercialization and the loss of its ritual functions have debased Mithila painting, versus those who see Mithila Painting as a contemporary art form rooted in the expanding experience, concerns, and freedoms of Mithila's women.[121] These below paintings are some of the examples of the

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[121] *Mithila Painting: The Evolution of an Art Form.* Accessed 21 March 2021

above-mentioned forms and styles which different artists practiced in the different eras between the 1930s and the present time, the oldest ones by Sita Devi and Ganga Devi followed by Chano Devi's work and the most recent one by Manoj Pandit.

Left to Right: Madhubani by Sita Devi and Ganga Devi, Manjusha by Manoj Pandit and Godna by Chano Devi
(Source: Folkartopedia, pintrest, youtube)

The content and motif of the paintings have also evolved consisting of ritualistic topics, epics, mythology, Tantra, folklore, festival, nature, and more recently the local-to-global contemporary subjects. The prominent concepts across these painting forms include Kohbar, Aripan, Epics, Tantric concepts like Das Mahavidya, Local deities, Tree of Life, Everyday life, natural and social phenomena, etc. There has been a debate around the form of the painting whether folk or contemporary or craft or art, however, this terminological dispute is solely because of the commercial angle of the mainstream art market. One more dispute is over its name whether Mithila painting or Madhubani painting. Though both the terms are in practice, the term 'Mithila' is used as a cultural reference for the region that includes North Bihar and Terai Nepal whereas, by the term 'Madhubani', the geographical positioning of the art was proposed. However, these practices have never been limited to Madhubani only but spread across the cultural region. The painting tradition has got many gems of artists to be proud of. It is

difficult to mention all the names here, but for reference, the major contributors include Ganga Devi, Sita Devi, Jamuna Devi, Jagdamba Devi, Karpuri Devi, Chano Devi, Shanti Devi, Baua Devi, Mahasundari Devi, Batohi Jha, Krishnand Jha, Dulari Devi, Godavari Dutt, Bimla Dutt, Gopal Sah, Shivan Paswan, Urmila Devi, Vibha Das, Satya Narayan Lal Karn, Chandra Bhusan Lal Das, Kusum Das, Jai Narayan Lal Das, Ambika Devi, Manisha Jha, Asha Jha, Devendra Kumar Jha, Uttam Prasad Paswan, Punam Das, Hema Devi, Mamta Devi, Mahanma Devi[122], Santosh Das, Shalini Karn, Rambharos Jha, Golu Jha, Amrita Jha, Shantanu Das, Kamlesh Roy, Prateek Prabhakar, Sanjay Jaiswal, and many more. There are many companions of the artists in this journey, artist Bhaskar Kulkarni and Manu Pareekh, designer-architect Upendra Maharathi, Yves Vequad – maker of the film 'The Women Painters of Mithila', anthropologists Erika Moser and Raymond Lee Owens, Activist Gauri Mishra, connoisseur Tokyo Hasegawa, and Organisations like Master Craftsmen Association of Mithila and SEWA Mithila (Both at Madhubani), Ford Foundation and Ethnic Arts Foundation- the USA, Adithi (Bihar), and Mithila Museum (Tokamachi, Japan), many permanent private/institutional collections and museums across the world, to name a few.

Black: An Artist's Tribute by Santosh Das (Source: Tara Books)

Mother Earth by Gopal Sah (Source: Madhubani Art Center)

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[122] *Awardees*. Accessed 21 March 2021. www.umsas.org.in

Perspective on the Practice

Semiotic Expression of Life

Mithila painting is deeply rooted in nature, coupled with the inspiration that emerged out of women's craving for spirituality and 'to be one with God...And...the belief that painting something divine would achieve that desire...[123] The triad of nature, human and divine reflects in the motifs, content, concept, and patterns. The motifs largely derived from the natural life are used to interpret the personal-social-spiritual aspects of life. The major components of earthly life - water, earth, sky, fire, wind are the core concepts. These are also the vital elements for living in Mithila in terms of sustainable farming, livestock, orchards, forest products like bamboo and herbs, and aquatic products like fox-nut, fish, lotus, buck fruit, etc. The major concepts of paintings like Kohbar, Aripan, Epics, Tantric concepts like Das Mahavidya, Local deities, Tree of Life, Everyday life, natural and social phenomena, etc. have different creative, mathematical, philosophical depictions.

Ardhnarishwar by Amrita Jha (Source: peterzirnis.com)

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[123] *Madhubani Painting: A Historical Context*. 2020. Archives, ICH Bihar. Accessed 20 March 2021. www.folkartopedia.com

As the below diagram 'Creative Process', the creative process is cyclic and fluid in nature which begins with certain observations of the world around or particular imagination inspired/affected by some motivating factors. That undergoes through an inner process and comes out as an artistic expression. The concept and perspective developed through the process build the understanding and strengthens the belief-system. The learning from the process enriches the subsequent cycle of the creative process further. Such a process can generally be seen in any culture and particularly in any art tradition.
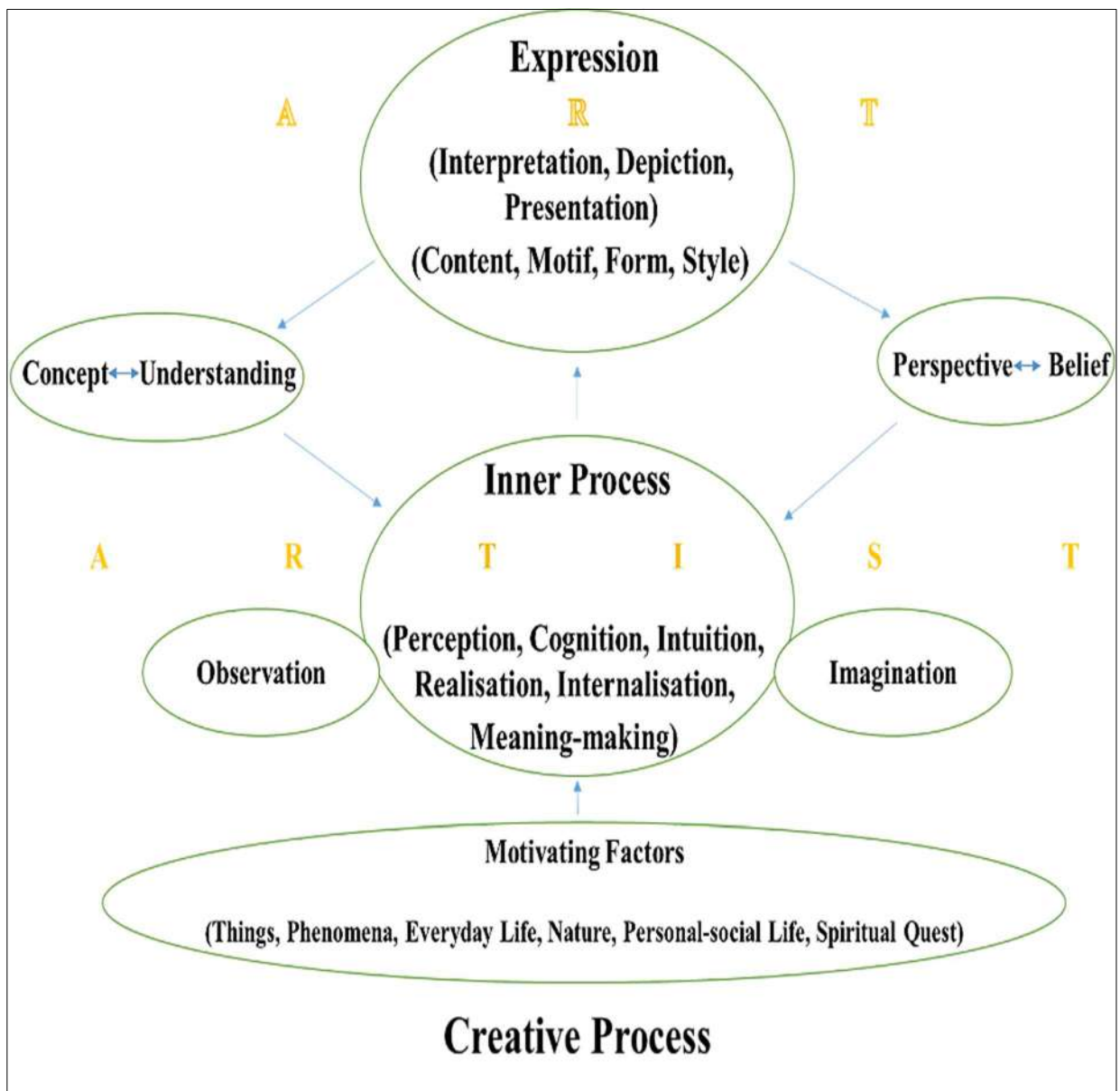
One of the 'old tradition(s) of painting the walls of the nuptial chamber, is called 'Kohbar'. The paintings are an assemblage of symbolic images of the lotus plant, the bamboo grove, fishes, birds, and snakes in the union, and represent fertility and the proliferation of life. According to conventional ritual practice, the bride and the groom spend three nights in this chamber without cohabiting, and on the fourth, amidst the paintings, consummate the marriage.[124] Other symbolic artistic works are also done on the wall of the worship chamber at a designated part of the house, called 'Gosain Ghar' or 'family deity's Chinbar'. These paintings are done inside the house whereas other various types of paintings are done on the outer walls of the house. Kohbar is the ancient mural tradition still prevalent in Mithila painting. For the painters, it is writing (Likhiya) through which they portray different signs, symbols, motifs to express their ideas and feelings. The Kohbar motifs symbolises different aspects of life – Naina Jogin on four corners (protecting from evil misfortune), Panch Devta (blessings), Navgrah (Positive energy), Vidhi-Vidhata (divine force), god Mahadev and goddess Gauri (ideal couple), Elephant (Prosperity), Turtle (longevity and reproductive capacity), Sun-moon (Vital energy), Fish (attraction, spirit, belief), Parrots (loving couple), Bamboo and Kamaldah (Lotus family -growth/expansion of family and living happily in any situation)[125], love birds, Kadamb tree, Mango and Mahua trees, the betel house, snake in the couple (intense love), Candle, Kalash, Bel and Supari trees, the bride in palanquin along with bearers, household objects, etc.

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[124] Jain, Jyotindra. 1997. *Ganga Devi*: *Traditions and Expressions in Mithila Painting*. USA: Grantha Corporation. Introduction

[125] *Kohbar/Kohbar Chitran: Nirupan evam uske Prateekarth*. 2020. Accessed 22 March 2021. www.folkartopedia.com

Then one day, when I was passing the village pond, a strange thing happened. As I stood and looked at the children playing, the scene turned into a picture in my mind. It came alive, bright and lively, telling stories. I was happy the whole day, thinking of my picture.

Following my Paint brush by Dulari Devi (Source: Tara Books)

The basic structure of Kohbar painting including the central motifs are continued to be drawn in almost the same manner, besides, the artists take the freedom to interpret and depict the whole or part of the theme differently. The style, use of colour, and pattern have also transformed. The three following Kohbar paintings are from three different periods of time, the 1930s, 1980s, and 2020s, respectively. The first one is a black and white picture of the basic painting on the wall taken by Archer at the house of Pandit Vaidyanath Jha of Pahitol. The second one is part of a huge mural and the third one is a 7'x7' wall-sized painting. Though Kohbar painting is a part of marriage ritual and considered auspicious, the core idea, theme, and structure remain the same as seen in these three works but the elaboration and interpretation is different as well as some of the motifs are added on. The 40 to 50 years of the gap between the paintings is also seen in the progressive conceptual change.
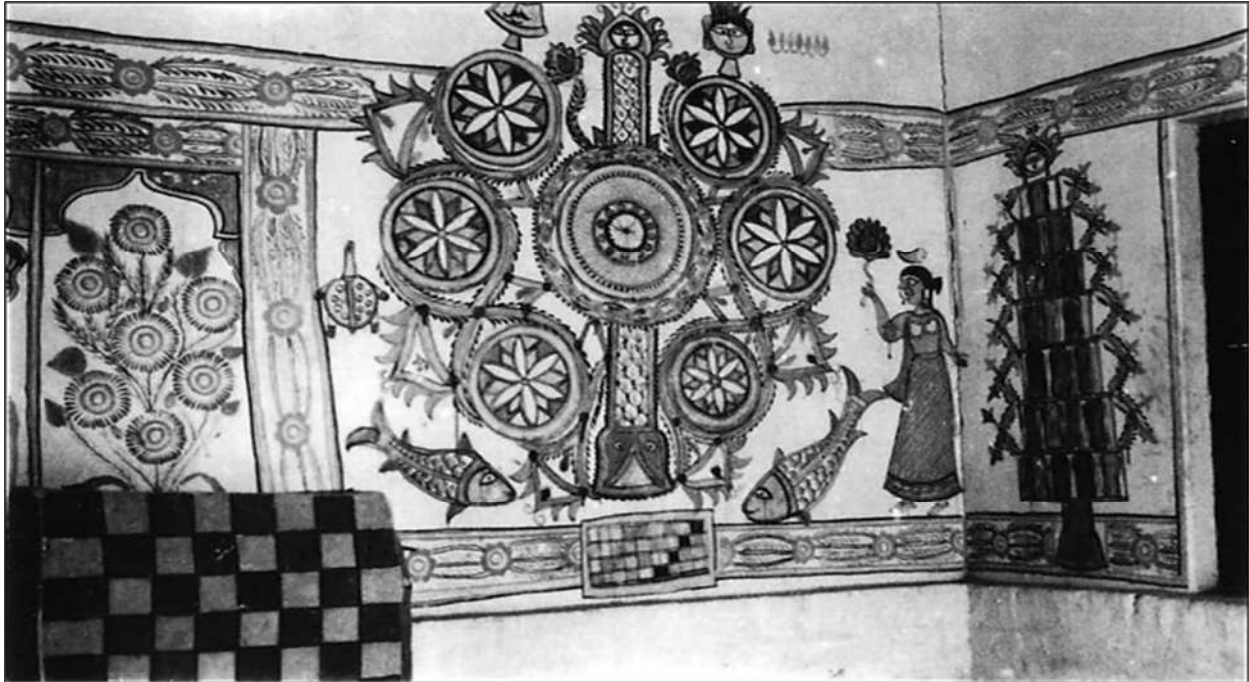
Kohbar_1930s_At Pahitol - Darbhanga [Source: EAF]

Kohbar_1980s_ by Ganga Devi [Source: Crafts Museum]

Kohbar_2020s_by Shalini Karn [Source: peterzirnis.com]

Kohbar has ritualistic, familial, cultural, and spiritual values. It is made in different colours including sole-red, sole-yellow, or multi-coloured which have different occasion-specific significance. Besides, its auspicious relation with the marital affairs and establishment of married life,[126] it also symbolizes feminine power. Ganga Devi in her beautiful, elaborated landmark painting added on the new patterns, motifs like parrot-couple and the herd of parrots, elephant, turtle, Kalash, bride worshipping goddess Gauri, bride in palanquin, etc. significantly more prominence to the bride (women) and the love between the couple. In the third painting, Shalini takes these ideas to the next level, somehow taking more openness and creativity in approach and depiction.

'A magnificent Kohbar hovers large over the land its top reaching up into a dark blue sky with barely visible distant mountains… The light blue water teems with gaily colored and auspicious life, turtles, small fish, crabs, snakes, and lotus flowers. The Kohbar's center is a second Kohbar, a shining Purain of yellow lotus leaves… This second Kohbar is a microcosm of the 'maha' (greater) Kohbar that surrounds it… This Kohbar is a force of love and joy and union.[127] The painting by taking Kohbar beyond the confinement to the wide-open universal canvas tries to give a world view with strong feminine strength. The traditional Shiva and Gauri are replaced with Ardhnareeshwar on the top left below the sun and both wife and husband in palanquin instead a lonely bride signifies the union and spiritual basis of equality in the man-women relationship. The well-entwined depiction of five elements of sky, earth, water, fire, and wind using colour, patterns, and motifs present the inter-connectedness of atmosphere, biosphere, and hydrosphere. She has thought and expressed beyond the limitation and bounds. The concept of triad

[126] *Tradition of Kohbar Paintings: Bihar and UP*. 2020. Accessed 22 March 2021. www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWpVUzsQEcc
[127] *The Kohbar Resplendent*. 2021. Accessed 23 March 2021. www.peterzirnis.com

of nature, human and divine is well reflected in this tradition which is fluid, progressive, creatively open, and carried on by the Commons, prominently women. The transformation is seen not only in the form and style but in the content and concept.

Depicting Alaukika (Psychic-spiritual dimension)

A spirituality experiences itself as supported by both the spiritual and the physical dynamics of the cosmic-earth processes, and brings the human, the other-than-human and the Divine into a communion that permits us to discover ourselves in the universe just as the universe discovers itself in us'.[128] The communion – triad of nature, human and divine is tried to be understood, decoded, and depicted in Mithila painting. Two aspects of such representations are discussed here, examples of Aripan and Tantra painting. The former is generally found whereas Tantra paintings are specific practice. Nevertheless, Aripan is also made using Tantra motifs and there are specific Tantra Aripans as well. A variety of floor painting forms is found all across India with different names like Alpona (Bengal), Mandna (Rajasthan), Kolam (Kerela), Rangoli (Maharashtra), etc. Aripan is the Mithila version of this art also ''known as 'Mandal' (Alepan in Sanskrit) …The sub-forms and constituents of Aripan include 'Sarvatobhadra', 'Swastik', 'Shodashdal', 'Ashtdal', etc. Aripan is generally made using rice paste (Pithar) and vermillion (Senur) on the floor washed with cow dung and white soil…the women are well-acquainted with the (significance, value) and the types of the Aripan according to particular festivals and occasions. It is made one for almost every auspicious

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[128] O'Hara, Dennis Patrick. 2015. *Thomas Berry's Understanding of the Psychic- Spiritual Dimension of Creation: Some sources*. Accessed 24 March 2021.

occasion or celebration with a notion that it purifies the place of the event and fetches the blessings of the divine. The painting primarily supports and enriches the creative expression of women and facilitates group art.[129]
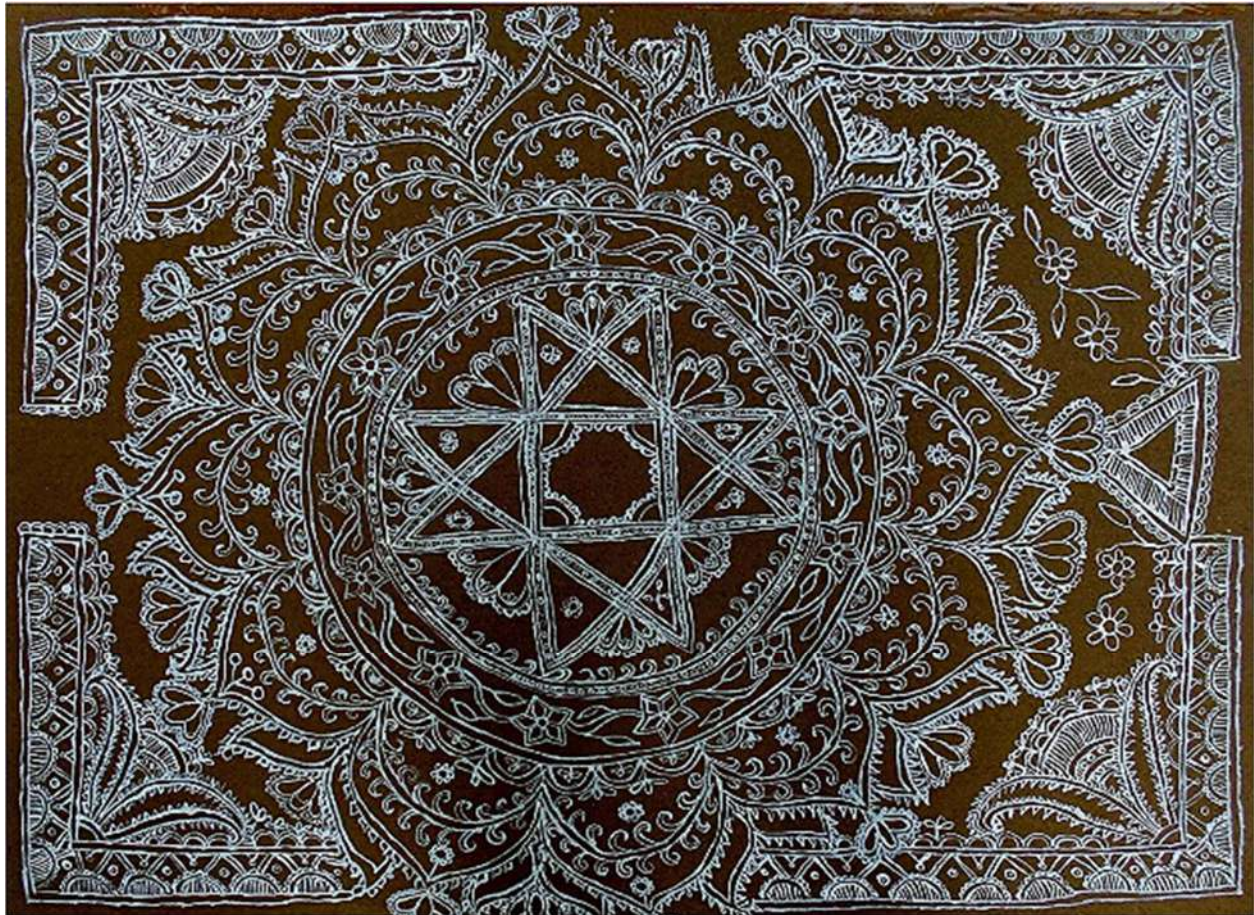
Tantrik Aripan by Golu Jha [Source: amazon.in]

The triad reflects in the art in which the symbols, geometrical structures, figures of household objects, and depiction of divine using the motifs derived from nature. "Aripan is mostly in the form of semi geometric floral diagrams. Each diagram has a well-defined center on which an installation of a sacred pot plate, a basket, or a seat is made for ritual purposes. The intricately patterned diagrams are dotted with

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[129] *Aripan*. Interview with the artist Nibha Chaudhary. Accessed 23 March 2021. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCq5iWGHncVPLw8AG8wRjIKw

vermilion at specific pints. Most of these are in the form of a lotus flower or plant."[130] For example in Satyanarayan Puja, eight angles and adjoining Asht dal (lotus petals) surrounds the eight attributes of god – Shankh, Chakra, Gada, Trishul, Damru, Lotus, Khadag, Jhail mentioned in eight blocks at the exteriors of the angles and the leg of god at the center. During marital occasions like Mahuak during Chathari (first four days), two lotus leaves symbolise the unification of the bride-groom. In Devotthan Ekadashi, the central structure surrounded by eight lotus petals is accompanied by household objects, objects related to livelihood means, farming tools, etc. Aripan consists of various geometrical shapes – triangle, circle, semi-circle. The Tantrik Aripan which is also made for Tantrik rituals and meditational purposes, has more complicated shapes than the ones made for common occasions. The women have their own way of connecting with the divine. Their spiritual quest is rooted in their everyday life and decoded through the aspect of the material world.

Aripan- Devotthan Ekadashi, Satyanarayan Puja, Bhatru Dvitiya [Source: brahmipublication.com, Artist Neebha Chaudhary]

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[130] Jain, Jyotindra. 1997. *Ganga Devi*: *Traditions and Expressions in Mithila Painting*. Introduction

Mithila has believers of both the sects of Shaiva and Shakta. Vaishnava sect is relatively small. Historically, the Shakta sect has ancient roots, however, Shaivism got prominence later. Tantra has Shakta root as well as a strong connection with the Mahayana sect of Buddhism. Nevertheless, the existing small-scale Tantra practice has its distinguished system which gives the Tantra paintings their basis. 'These specific practices and techniques include initiation (Diksha) into a sect; the recitation of sacred formula (mantra) and meditation on sacred diagrams (yantras); rituals usually aimed at awakening the kundalini energy that lies dormant and coiled like a female serpent in the subtle body in order to bring about a spiritual transformation of the adept; conceptualization of the whole cosmic process as the work of the feminine energy (Shakti) in its different forms; and transgressive rites'[131] through material means. Krishnanad Jha from Harinagar (Madhubani) is one of the few names of Tantrik painters. His paintings are the unique artistic depiction (Chitra) of the divine energy based on the geometrical interpretation – Yantroddhar to diagram (Yantra) of the lingual depiction – Mantroddhar to the verses (Mantra) of the knowledge by the visualizer (Drushta). His works consist majorly of the depiction of ten Mahavidya (the ten great wisdom, the forms of Shakti- Kali, Tara, Tripura Sundari, Bhuvaneshvari, Bhairavi, Chhinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bagalamukhi, Matangi, and Kamala).

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[131] Brown, Carolyn Henning. 1996. *Contested Meanings: Tantra and the Poetics of Mithila Art*. American Enthologist 23 (4). Page 722

Tantrik Paintings by Krishnanad Jha [Source: peterzirnis.com]

In the above painting, 'these are two of the ten Mahavidya goddesses who are manifestations of the great goddess envisioned and worshiped as the Supreme-being of all existence. Chinnamasta (on the left) is shown holding her severed head in one hand while standing on a copulating couple. Three streams of blood spout from her neck, one into her own mouth and the other two into the mouths of her two followers. In simplest terms, Krishnanand Jha says, she represents the destructive and generative principle of the world. The other goddess, Baglamuki, is the goddess who releases individuals from their spiritual misconceptions and also defeats their enemies. She is shown pulling the tongue of a demon with one hand while preparing to crush him with the club she holds in the other. The yantra diagram painted below each goddess is necessary for the proper execution of their worship ritual.'[132] These works deal at a different level, done by the practitioners of Tantra themselves. Nevertheless, the aspects of Tantra are found in other forms of Mithila paintings - Kohbar and Aripan. The process of decoding the knowledge of divine feminine energy through Mantra and Yantra and depicting through Chitra works in the psychic-spiritual realm. The material means are used to form the connection and achieve the desired goal.

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[132] The Tantric Gods of Krishnanad Jha. 2013. Accessed 24 March 2021. www.peterzirnis.com

Most of these forms of visual expressions in Mithila philosophize and symbolize the human sensibilities to the nature and divine, and finds out the meaning of life. The aspect of triad of nature, human and divine reflects in the interconnection through various processes of encoding, decoding, creation of symbols, and interpretation through motifs, patterns, content, and concept. Here, 'nature' refers to the entities/objects other-than-human whereas 'divine' refers to the imperceptible supreme force. The motifs largely derived from the natural life are used to interpret the personal-social-spiritual aspects of life, and decode the attributes of nature and divine and their relationship with the human, and expressed them as works of art. The various forms of arts in Mithila including Sikki weaving, Sujni embroidery, painting, sculpture and others are deep-rooted in tradition and everyday life. Besides the ceremonial and ritualistic values associated with these arts, many artists have gone beyond the existing practice to depict their everyday life, struggles, thought-process, reflections on personal-social life, and spiritual sensibilities, comprising the psychic and material elements. The tradition of arts in Mithila has become fluid, progressive, creatively open, and carried on by the Commons, prominently women. The cyclic and fluid creative process of arts begins with certain observations of the world around or particular imagination inspired/affected by some motivating factors. The subsequent inner process of an artist yields various artistic expressions. The concept and perspective developed through the process continuously build the understanding and strengthens the belief-system. The learning from the process enriches the consequent cycle of the creative process further. The origin and evolution of these practices are because of the collective human efforts, that is why similar tradition is found all across a certain region/s although the engagement with the practice varies.

Chapter 6

Triad of Nature, Human & Divine (Musical Expressions)

Music is produced by different arrangements of sound using rhythm, melody, pitch, tempo and their synchronisations. The various sources of sound include nature – birds, animals, wind, water, trees, etc. or humans or human-made objects like the instruments. Music either conveys emotion or stimulates it and so even the silence (absence of sound) and language (articulation of sound) are also part of it. Language uses symbols/verbal/non-verbal expressions to convey the emotion as well as to communicate the thought through a meaning-making process between producer and receiver. "The meaning of language can be literal or figurative. Literal language states exactly what something is. On the other hand, figurative language creates meaning by comparing one thing to another thing. Poets use figures of speech in their poems…some of them are simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and understatement. A simile compares one thing to another by using the words *like* or *as.* A metaphor compares one to another by saying one thing *is* another. A personification involves giving a non-human, inanimate object the qualities of a person. A hyperbole is an exaggeration of the truth in order to create an effect and Understatement is the exact opposite of a hyperbole.[133]'' In a way, music is the varied representation of the emotion and thoughts as well as it interprets certain meaning and state of mind. Human has discovered the music from nature and developed it as a discipline. It is certainly a great feature of evolution shared by the whole world equally and advance it in a

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[133] *Figures of Speech in Poetry*. Writing Poetry. Accessed 27 October 2021. www.lumenlearning.com

variety of ways and forms. Every nook and corner of the world has some kind of musical tradition. Similarly, Mithila has also housed a range of inter/intra human and nature-human explorations in the field of music. The triad of nature, human and divine, in which 'nature' refers to the entities/objects other-than-human whereas 'divine' refers to the imperceptible supreme force, reflects in the tradition of musical practices in Mithila. In continuation of the previous section discussing the visual expressions of the triad, this section will discuss some of the musical expressions which manifest various interconnections between nature, human and divine.

Going beyond the tradition of Vedic musical practices, works of many scholars like the Karnata King Nanyadeva who wrote the commentary Bharata Bhashya on Bharats's Natyashastra and his compilation 'Sarasvatihrdayalankarahara', the works of poets Umapati and Jyotirishwar in their dramas, respectively 'Parijat Harana' and 'Dhurtsamagama', the great leagacy of Vidyapati who 'represented the golden age of Mithila music, when its influence on Nepal and other adjoining states is also visible', the musician Lochan's treatise on Ragas and Raginis of Mithila 'Ragatarangini'[134], Shubhankar Thakur's work 'Sangeet-Damodar', the works of later poets- musicians- singers like Mangan Khabaas belonged to a family of bonded labour called 'Khabaas' at Navgachhia dyodhi (estate) who besides classical singing, gave life to Vidyapati's works by making bhaas (tune) of more than 400 songs, Darshan Dubey (Dumka), Bhavpreetananad Ojha or Abhinav Vidyapati (Devghar), Pradeep Bihari (Darbhanga), Snehlata (Samastipur), Buchru Paswan and Radha Mohan Jha (Madhubani) and others, the wide varieties of Maithili music evolved, developed and practiced by the Commons especially

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[134] Chaudhary, Radhakrishna. 1976. *Mithila in the Age of Vidyapati*. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia. Page 437

women, unfold and depict every aspect of human-social life whether human emotions and reflections, everyday worldly affairs, festivity, rituals, relation with nature and divine and so on.

Structure of the Practice

The huge repertoire of Maithili music can be seen as certain representations of the aspects of individual and social life (human emotions - pain, pleasure, devotion, love, spirit of community, etc.) or association with particular occasions (rituals, festivals, agricultural activities, etc.), relationship with nature (seasons, river, etc.) or musical story-telling such as the ballads in Folklore, poetry/songs in musical theatre and Women's Theatre performances. There have been some attempts to do the systematic study of Maithili songs, however, that do not seem very structured, for example - the broad sets of songs are suggested as (a) Hymns or Devotional songs- the hymns around Lord Shiva, Lord Krishna, Lord Rama, goddesses Kali and Durga as well as folk deities. (b) 'Rites and Rituals' – related to different phases of life from birth to death. (c) Dahkan or abusive songs during marriage ceremony. (d) Betgabani or Travelogue - songs during different activities or travel by women. (e) Jog or song of enchantment - customs of sorcery during marriage or ways of hypnosis. (g) Songs of Sama - Chakeba based on a myth of immortal love. (h) Marsia - Muslim women sing Marsia in chorus often accompanied with the beats of Jharni - the splitted bamboo sticks, in the memory of the martyr of Hasan-Husaain in the battle field of Karbala. And (i) Lagani - songs of love and distancing from the lover, sung while operating grinding wheel.[135] In this classification, the names of some of these groups are just the particular songs like

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[135] *Maithili Literature*. Folk Literature. Accessed 25 September 2021. www.lisindia.ciil.org

Lagani, Marsia, etc. Similarly, Sama- Chakeba can go under a broad category of folklore. Another attempt of classifying the songs in seven groups is - 1) Songs representing the life-cycle events- birth, initiation rites, marriage etc. 2) Songs representing the annual calendar of events, further categorized in two groups: a) Agricultural songs and b) Festival songs. 3) Seasonal songs: Songs of the whole year with specific months like Barahmasa, Chhaumasa and Charimasa. These songs describe twelve, six and four months of separation respectively. These songs may be categorised in six basic types: a) Religious, b) agricultural c) narrative, d) lamentation of deserted love e) womanhood and chastity f) new experiments. 4) Wisdom songs: Every song reflects wisdom of the people but there are some specific songs that explain some dietetic and social restrictions to be followed. 5) Devotional songs: Devotional songs are then further categorized as follows: a) Bhajan and Kirtan sung generally in praise of Lord Vishnu, Ganga, Shiva and Shakti. b) Parati (Morning songs) - Reverential songs sung in the morning in praise of gods and goddesses. c) Gosaunik-git and Bhagabati-git -sung generally in praise of the family deities. d) Songs of Shiva -These are further classified as i) Nachari, in which a devotee by singing and dancing explains her helplessness to the Lord and ii) Mahesbani, in which the story of Shiva and his family members are narrated. e) The mendicant's songs: These are the songs of the beggars or helpless. The texts express the disabled condition and distress of the singer. 6) Songs of love and beauty: Some songs express the inner most feelings of a lover or beloved. The songs of this category include: Batgamani portraying the beloved during the point of time when she goes to meet her lover. Gwalari, Raasa, Maana, Caravan songs also fall under this category. 7) Songs of glory describe the glory, history, beauty of the land and the people etc. These lyrics, known as Katha-Gathas, give a detailed account of the incidents.[136] Between the above two

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[136] Mishra, Kailash. *Classification of Maithili Songs*. Accessed 21 September 2021.

classifications of songs, the later one seems quite structured and inclusive in terms of outlining the types of songs based on their representations and particular association with Maithil life. Nevertheless, to understand the music of Mithila in totality and to include other aspects of music – the songs, instruments, practitioners, cultural associations, institutional practices and development of a body of artistic works and knowledge, a further classification can be done to present the varied traditions.
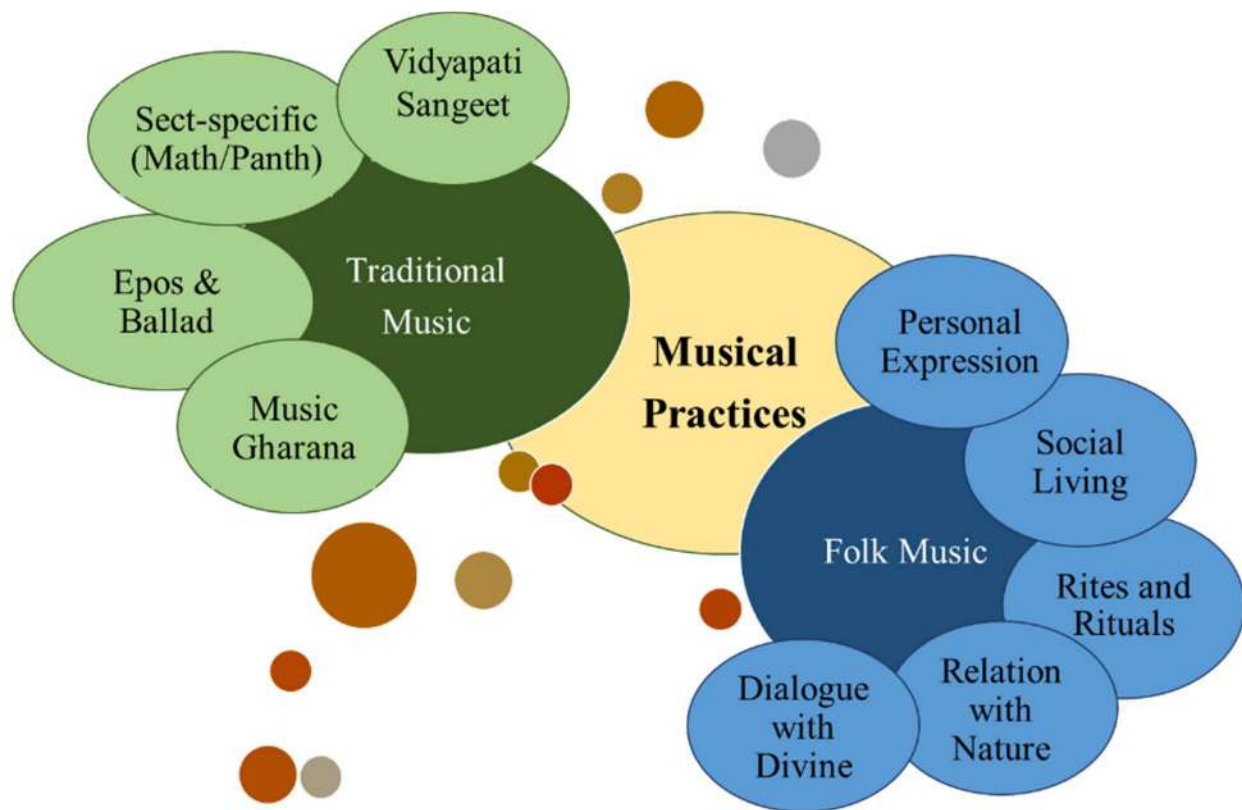
The above image illustrates the variety of Maithili music in terms of the types of their practices under two heads of traditional and folk music. These two terms 'Traditional' and 'Folk' are sometimes used interchangeably owing to the commonness of practice and practitioner. The traditional music has bases in the timeless folk and the folk music is practiced traditionally. In this study, the two terms are taken for the purpose of classification based on the aspects of

commonness and timelessness of practice (folk) as well as the development of certain practice at a particular point of time and sustained practice thereafter (traditional). The folk music can be classified into five types, based on particular cultural associations and their representations – Personal Expression, Social Living, Rites and Rituals, Relation with Nature as well as Dialogue with Divine. The traditional music can be grouped in four different types – Vidyapati Sangeet, Sect-specific (Panth/Math) music tradition, Music Gharana as well as Epos & Ballad. The musical tradition of Mithila also has a range of unique instruments like Odhni Baja, Jharni, Sarangi, instruments used in the performances of Rasanchauki, Nach, Mahrai, Pamariya and so on. The instruments of Mithila need a separate detailed study including its evolution, various types of musical instruments including String, Wind, Brass, Membrane and Plate musical instruments, technicalities in making, practice, uniqueness etc. The following descriptions of musical practices include some of the references of the instruments.

Folk Music

The five types of folk music depict various aspects of personal-social life as well as the human relation with nature and divine. Personal expression includes the songs and musical practices at a personal level or as part of a small homogeneous group depicting the individuals' reflections of life and the situation, intimate relationships, close connections within a homogenous group. Some of these songs express the inner most feelings of individuals like Batgamani, Gwalari, Raasa, Maana, Kajri, Lagni, Samdaun, Malaar, Tirhut, Sammar Geet, Kumari Geet etc. Sammar and Kumari Geet describe various inner conflicts of the young girls and their parents regarding their marriage and life. Batgamani (also known as

Batgabani) primarily portrays feelings for one's beloved - union with him or separation. As the name suggests, this type of song is sung by women in chorus while walking in groups on the way. The rhythm and tempo of the song coincide with the speed of walking. Whether going for fetching water from well or going to a fair or pilgrimage, women sing it during most of their everyday life activities or during rites and rituals. Sometimes on occasions, women are accompanied by the male artists of Rasanchowki playing piphi - a kind of wind/blow instrument and drums 'dhol', 'dugdugi' and 'dampha'. Rasanchowki is played during celebration of birth and marriage ceremony, for invocation during rituals and even during the funeral procession. These songs are the public platform for women to express their freedom and express fearlessly - the description of love, kisses, hugs, sexuality, affection and so on.

Rasanchowki (source – Mithirang Tarang)

An example of love and union -

> Kaanch kali Pahu todathi Sajni Ge,
>
> Lai kora baisaay Sajni ge.
>
> Adhar sura-sam pibathi Sajni Ge,
>
> Jauban dekhi lobhay Sajni ge.
>
> Lai bhujpaas baanhi sunu Sajni ge,
>
> Jakhan Karathi Barjori Sajni ge.

The lady says that her beloved is trying to break the raw bud while having her sit on his lap; is sucking her vinous lips; Seeing her huge breasts, he has become

greedy and is holding her tight in his arms; the poor she, being uncomfortable, opposes, then he uses force;

Another example of separation depicted in a rainy night–

> Jakhan gagan ghan garjat Sajni ge,
>
> Suni hahrat jeev mor Sajni ge.
>
> Prannath pardes gel Sajni ge,
>
> Chit bhel chaan chakor Sajni ge.
>
> Eksari bhavan hum kaamini Sajni ge,
>
> Damini lel jeev mor Sajni ge.

When the dense cloud sky is roaring on this dark night, the lady's heart starts to panic. His beloved is in a foreign country, her heart and mind become the moon and Chukar bird? How will she spend this dark rainy night sitting alone in the house?[137] The songs representing Social Living are related with the social events, activities and common knowledge of folk wisdom, can be clubbed as a) Agricultural songs – sung during the farm activities like Dhanropni Geet - Gablaggi (sowing the paddy sapling), Kadpakhaar (mixing the soil) and songs on the occasions like Pakheb (worshipping the livestock – cow/ox), songs and Aripan painting on Devotthan Ekadeshi (start of farming activities), etc. b) Festival songs – describe and unfold the aspects of festivity like Fagua during Holi, Chaurchan (worship of moon), Jitiya (ritual for longevity of the offspring), Chhath,

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[137] Mishra, Dr. Kailash Kumar. *Batgamani Lokgeet men Mithila ki Mahilaon ka Manobhav*. Accessed 16 January 2022. www.kailashkumarmishra.com

celebrated on the sixth day of Diwali and involves the worship of the sun, Jhijhiya song and dance during Durga Puja and so many more and c) Wisdom songs: reflect people's knowledge related to the way of life, social norms and time-tested learning. An example of Dhanropni Geet below is sung during sowing the paddy. In the water-filled farm land, women and men sow the paddy sapling, the sound of muddy water 'chhupur chhap' when they move gives a beautiful rhythm and background music.

Dhanropni Geet (Source- Maithili TV)

Sasur men chhai sasur bhainsurba aaro chhai devarvaa ye,

Lalna re lagai chhai re udaas, lagai chhai udaas se yai balumma binu,

Nahiraa men chhai bhai re bhatijwa aaro chhai bhaujai ye,

Lalna re lagai chhai re udaas, lagai chhai udaas se yai amma binu[138]

The lady says that her brother-in-laws and father-in-law are there at her in-laws' house. But she feels sad without her husband. In her mother's house, her brother, his wife and his son are there. But she feels sad without her mother. The feel of

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[138] *Geet aa Gab: Mithilaak Baibhav.* Accessed 8 February 2022. www.youtube.com/watch?v=1na1tAiqMew

these songs are largely loneliness and separation. It is somehow a strange combination of the hard work-intensive sowing process with such feeling of the song. Another song 'Lagni' which is sung during stone-grinding the flour also has the feel of loneliness and separation. The husbands of these women are away from home, have gone to distant places to work and to earn livelihood.

Jhijhiya (Source- www.jagran.com)

An example of Jhijhiya song, invoking the village deity and urging to save people from the bad omen during the puja festival of goddess Durga, goes like this –

Tohre Bharose Barham baba Jhijhri banailiye ho

Barham baba jhijhri par hoyau aswaar

Abodhwa baalak tohar kichhiau ne janai chha ho

Tohre Bharose Barham baba Jurvaa banailiye ho

Barham baba jurvaa par hoyau aswaar

Abodhwa baalak tohar kichhiau ne janai chha ho

The ladies invoke the presence of Barham baba – the guardian of the village in their Jhijhri – a clay pot with several holes through which comes the light of a candle kept inside the pot.

Wisdom songs are also called Dak Vachan which are the proverbs found in oral forms and frequently referred by the Commons, describe various aspects of human-social life. The name Dak comes at the end of many proverbs, seems a character who may be the narrator or the author as well, whose origin is contested. The similar character like Ghagh, Daank, Taank, Baddri, Khanaa is also found in other cultures of the states of Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Orissa, Rajasthan, etc. A further chapter in this book does a detailed discussion on Dak Vachan. A few couplets related to farming suggestions are mentioned below -

Uttam kheti madhyam bān,

Nikhid chākari bhikh nidān.

[Cultivation is the best of all occupations; trade is of medium value; one must not take up service (as an occupation); and begging is worthless.]

Har bahai ta apno bahi, nahi bahi ta baisalo rahi

Ja puchi har bāhā kahān, biya bunab bekāj tahan.

[One should hold the plough and do the cultivation himself. One who does not move with ploughmen should at least remain present in the field. But one who sits at home and questions the whereabouts of the ploughmen should not sow seeds.][139]

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[139] Jha, Sadan. 2014. *Dak Vachan: Proverbial Wisdom from Mithila, Bihar. History and Sociology of South Asia*. SAGE Publications. January 2014 8(1). Page 40

The third type of folk music is related to the Rites and Rituals, the songs that illustrate the life-cycle events and various rites (Samskara) from the birth and initiation rites to the last rites as well as rituals related to every aspect of human life. Sanskaar geet consists of all the life-cycle events and rites like Sohar, Mundan and Upanayan song, songs related to marriage like Parichhan, the song during examining the groom on the start of ceremony, Madhu Shravani celebrated in the month of Shravan (August) is one of the rituals involves a newlywed couple, Dahkan or abusive songs, Jog or mystic songs and Godna or tattoo songs for good omen are some of the examples. Pamaria music and dance is an important attraction on the occasion of child birth ceremony. Besides the Pamariya groups of men, the groups of transgenders also visit the house where new baby is born and celebrate the occasion by singing and dancing. Generally, a three-member Pamariya group consists of one dancer and two singers/instrument players. The dancer wears a ghaghra (long skirt), choli (blouse) and a Dupatta (scarf). Pamariya is also the name of these artists' community. Most of them practice their art professionally which fetch them a meagre income. Most of them follow the Muslim faith and have lower socio-economic status. They sing the celebration songs - badhaiya, Hindu/Muslim folk devotional songs like Nachari, Maheshvani, the folk-tales as well as customize/improvise the songs according to the household they visit. The instruments they play are dholak, dholakiya, khanjri, ghunghru, etc. Interestingly, an all men performing group performs especially for women - the majority audience inside the house or in the courtyard making it exceptional, as on regular days the strangers particularly the men are not allowed.

Pamariya Nach (source - Youtube)

The next type is around the Relation with Nature. These are the songs in which the elements of nature are metaphorically used to depict the aspects of life or they give the wisdom of how to live with nature. They are around different objects of nature like river, trees, etc., or phenomena like the seasons found throughout the year. The elements of nature, their essence and attributes are used to ornate the human emotions, thoughts and relationships. The river songs portray their glory, myths and the aspects of the human-river relationship. For example - river Koshi (Kaushiki) is considered as mother, also known as Saptakaushiki - the seven streams of Indravati, Sun Kosi, Tama kosi, Likhu kosi, Dudh kosi, Arun kosi, and Tamar kosi which originate from Himalaya in Nepal, merge with each-other on the way and finally with Ganga at Kursela in the Katihar district of Bihar. The river is named as 'sorrow of Bihar' as it changes its course frequently and causes huge devastation. However, Kosi is also presented as a lively maiden of extraordinary beauty who likes to adorn herself. The song below expresses a woman's plight how she and her brother on the way to her mother's house died in the floods,

Beech hi samudra hey sakhiya, tooti gelai hey gairooliya,

Hamhoon je bhelai hey sakhiya, van ke hey koyaliya,

Bhaiyya mor bhelai hey sakhiya, kosi maaye ke hey sandesba.

[My friend, in mid-stream the makeshift square float has got broken. I have become a koyal (cuckoo bird) of the forest, My brother has become an offering (sandesh) to Kosi mother.]

The river also becomes the close companion with whom any feeling can be shared, like in the song below a woman admits her need to satisfy her sexual urges.

Joora le badheliya he Kosi maaye laami laami kesiya he,

Bhoge le je kailiye patre balmua re.

[I grew long hair in order to make a bun, O Kosi mother. I got a handsome husband for sexual enjoyment.] [140]

Songs like Barahmasa (twelve months), Chhaumasa (six months), Charimasa (four months), Chaitaavar (song of Chait month) describe the respective months of separation, loneliness, struggle, and other facets of life - religious, agricultural, narratives of everyday life, lamentation of deserted love, womanhood and chastity, etc. For example, a song suggests what to avoid eating or doing in a particular month to remain well and healthy.

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[140] Bharti, Dr. Omprakash. 2002. *Nadiyan Gaati Hain*. Dharohar: Sahibabad. Accessed 17 February 2022. www.folkindia.com

Saonak saag ne Bhaadvak dahi, Aasinak os ne Kaatikak mahi.

Aghanak jeer ne Pushak dhani,
Maaghak mishri ne Faagunak chana.

Chaitak Gur ne Baishakhak tel,
Jethak chalab ne Ashadhak bel.

Kahe Dhanvantari ahi sabsan bache,
Ta Vaidraaj kahe puriya rache.

[Eating green leafy veg in August is bad for health so is the curd in September. Sleeping in open in night dew in October and drinking whey in November are harmful. Similarly, cumin seeds in December, coriander in January, sugar candy in February, gram in March, jaggery in April, oil in May, walking in the sun in June and wood apple in July are bad for health. Dhanvantari suggests if you refrained from these things, why the doctor would make medicine for you.]

The sixth type of folk music is the Dialogue with Divine: They are hymns or devotional songs a) Bhajan and Kirtan sung generally in praise of Lord Vishnu, Ganga, Shiva and Shakti. b) Parati (Morning songs) - Reverential songs sung in the morning in praise of gods and goddesses. c) Gosaunik-git and Bhagabati-git, sung generally in praise of the family deities. d) Songs of Shiva -These are further classified as i) Nachari, in which a devotee by singing and dancing explains her helplessness to the Lord and ii) Mahesbani, in which the story of Shiva and his family members are narrated. e) The mendicant's songs: These are the songs of the beggars or helpless. The texts express the disabled condition and distress of the

singer.[141] An example of Maheshbani, Mainavati, mother of Gauri (Parvati) reproaches Naarad (the messenger of gods) and regrets having Shiva as son-in-law-

> Hum nahi jaanal ge mai,
>
> Ehan bar Naarad johi lautaa, dekhtahi sab padaai.
>
> Teen lok ke maalik kahi-kahi hamra del patiyay,
>
> Antim palmen bhikhmanga ke laayal bar banai.
>
> Ekdis Gauri ker Muh takai chhii, dosar budh jamaai,
>
> Eee dekhite manme hoyat achhi, maritahun zahar-vish khaai,
>
> Hum nahi jaanal ge maai.

[O mother, I didn't know that Naarad would bring such a groom the sight of whom scares everybody. He (Naarad) convinced me saying Shiva as the lord of three worlds. And he has brought a beggar to be the groom. I see Gauri's face on the one hand and the face of the old son-in-law on the other. Sight of that makes me feel I would poison myself. O mother, I didn't know!]

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[141] Mishra, Dr. Kailash Kumar. *Batgamani Lokgeet men Mithila ki Mahilaon ka Manobhav*. Accessed 16 January 2022.

Traditional Music

The four different types of traditional music – Vidyapati Sangeet, Sect-specific (Panth/Math) music tradition, Epos & Ballad as well as Music Gharana are those music traditions whose origin can be traced in certain period of history and they mostly follow the works of legends, devotees, performers, musicians and poets. Their works are being carried forward by the practitioners, followers and Commons.

Vidyapati (Image courtesy- mypoeticside.com)

Vidyapati Sangeet is a genre of music based on the works of the great poet of Indian literature Vidyapati (1352-1448), also known as Maithil Kokila or cuckoo of Mithila. Though he was the scholar of Sanskrit - the then language of intellectuals, Prakrit and Avahatt, he made the spoken language of his region (he named that language as Desil Bayna which is later called as Maithili) the medium of his poetical compositions, sweet and charming, and invested it with an expressiveness worthy of a literary language.

As he says,

Sakka Vaani bahua na bhavai

Paua Ras ko mamma n paavai

Desil baina sab jan mittha

Tain taisan jampao avhatta

[Sanskrit language does not interest many, people do not understand the essence of Prakrit, everybody finds the indigenous language sweet, so I write in that only.]

Noted for his 800 Vaishnava and Saivite padas or songs, rescued from various palm-leaf manuscripts, Vidyapati is well-known for his works, some of the representative works are Purusa Pariksha, Bhu-Parikrama, Vibhava sagara, Danavakyavali, Gangavakyavali, Varsakritya, Durgabhaktitarangini, Saivasarvasvasara, Krittipataka, Kirttilata, Likhnavali, Durgabhaktitarangini, Pramanbhuv Puran Sangrah, Padavali, Gayapattlak and Goraksha Prakash. Vidyapati is highly popular not only among the Maithils but his works have also inspired the literary tradition of the neighbouring regions of Bengal, Assam, Orissa, Nepal and others. Under the liberal patronage and inspiring admiration of Shiva Singha, he has written about almost every aspect of the human-social life of Mithila- human emotions, social activities, rituals, devotional songs and so on. He was highly influenced by the works of the 12th century poet Jayadeva, the author of Geeta-Govinda. Vidyapati is known as 'Abhinav Jayadeva'. Vidyapati also followed the folk music tradition of Mithila and enriched them, took inspiration from them and expanded its horizon by writing in various genres of folk music in the language of Commons. His works can majorly be classified into 1) Works

dedicated to patrons in Apbhransha, 2) Intellectual works in Sanskrit and 3) Works for Commons in indigenous language. Similarly, songs can be classified into 1) Devotional, 2) Love and 3) Miscellaneous, the devotional songs are around Shiva, Gauri, Durga, Ganga, etc. Krishna and Radha are prominent in his love songs whereas miscellaneous songs relate to the nature and different aspects of human-social life.[142] Most of his songs are so deeply adopted by the Commons as if they were there for ever.

Some of the examples of his works are mentioned below –

In his 'Vasant-Varnan', he describes the spring season as a child including the birth of spring, growing up, coronation, war, love episode, his marriage with nature and so on.

> Shubh khan bera sukul pakkha he,
>
> Dinkar udit samai he,
>
> Sorah sampun batis lakhan sah,
>
> Janam lel riturai he.

[After nine months and five days of gestation, Vasant is born on the day of Shukla Panchami in the month of Magha (February)].

> Madhu lay Madhukar balak day hal,
>
> Kamal pankhari laai,

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[142] Mishra, Dr. Radhankant. *Ancient Poetry*. DDCE Utkal University. Accessed 5 February 2022. www.ddceutkal.ac.in

Paonaari tori sut bandhal kati,

Keshar kayel baghnai,

Nav-nav pallav sej ochhaol,

Sir del kadamb naal.

[The bumblebee has fetched honey from lotus petals for the boy 'Vasant'. The lotus placenta has been tied to his waist. Saffron has brought him the tiger-nails. New buds have made his bed and Kadamb placenta becomes his pillow.]

Kund balli taru chhayel nisaan,

Paatal tun ashok dal baan

KInsuk lata lavang ek sang,

Heri sisir pitu aage dal bhang,

Sain saajal madhu makhika kul,

Sisrak sabhu kiyel nirmul,

Udharal sarsij paol pran,

Nij nav dal karu asan daan.

[King Vasant organised his army, makes his flag of Kund spile, quiver made of Paatal leaf, makes arrows of Ashoka leaves, bow of Palash leaf and string of Lavang vine. The army of bees have gathered, attacked the winter and completely

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wiped it out. The lotus has survived the winter and it presents the king a throne of its new buds.]

Further the poet has described Vasant as a stimulus for love especially for women and urges people to enjoy the divine time its fullest. He has widely portrayed nature in its pure form, as support to human life and as stimulus. In Barahmasa (twelve months) songs, he symbolises the pain, agony and separation as the elements and phenomena of nature. In his love songs, both the union and separation have been beautifully depicted, mostly through Radha and Krishna as protagonists. In one of his poems, 'Shattered Desire' (translated in English) below, he describes how the agony of love shatters the desire like death.

Swelling breasts, hard, like golden cups.

Those wanton glances have stolen my heart,

O beautiful one, protest no longer.

I am eager as a bee, let me take your honey.

Darling, I beg you, holding your hands,

Do not be cruel, have pity on me.

I shall say that again and again,

No more can I suffer the agony of love.

Says Vidyapati, shattered desire is death.

This agony of love and shattered desire go further in his poem 'The End of Youth' (translated in English) below - sadness prevails as if youth is ended and the love roams wild.

> I hide my shabby cheeks
>
> With locks of hair,
>
> And my grey hairs
>
> In folds of flowers.
>
> I paint my eyes
>
> With black mascara.
>
> The more I try
>
> The more absurd I look.
>
> My breasts loosely dangle
>
> My curving lines are gone.
>
> My youth is ended
>
> And love roams wild
>
> In all my skin and bones.
>
> O sadness, my sadness, Where is my youth?[143]

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[143] *Love Songs of Vidyapati*. (1963). Accessed 15 January 2022. www.cse.iitk.ac.in

Sect-specific (Panth/Math) music tradition has evolved from different belief systems found in different sects. They are parallel religious-spiritual systems found alongside the major religions of Hinduism, Islam and others. Most of the devotees belong to lower socio-economic communities. Kabirpanth flourished among the followers of Kabir all across the South-Asian region and beyond. A variety of local adaptations of the faith as well the musical depictions of Kabir and his teachings are widely found including in Mithila as one of the biggest sects. The Gorakhnath/Nath sect is centred around eastern India and widely spread all over the country and further. Gudaria baba/gosains, the hermits (followers of Gorakhnath) are popular for their unique music and the use of the instrument 'Sarangi'. In Mithila especially the terai region of Nepal - Janakpur has Sadhukari tradition – people renounce all the worldly things and detached from their family life for the spiritual quest. Similarly, the followers of Raidas (Ravidas) and Valmiki traditions are also found in certain pockets. There are other Vedic schools and the allied reformist tradition like Arya Samaj have significant presence in Mithila. Vedic Chanting is practiced at number of these schools.

Kabir (source – Indian Post)

Kabir Math, Chatra, Madhubani (source: Abhishek Dev Narayan)

This Kabirpanthi or Nirgun (No attribute) song discusses the life and death, the purpose of life, the commitments the individuals have come to the earth with and what they do to their life. In this song, the earth is like one's parental house and the death is like going to one's in-law's house. Here the divine is portrayed as husband and human as wife.

> Karke Kabool yihaan aili, aaike baura gaili hey Ram,
>
> Kaa leke Jaiba sasurariya, kaa leke jaiba piya nagariya,
>
> Kaa leke jaiba ohi duariya, yehi sab niraa leliyai hey Ram.
>
> Ka jab chor yahi des men, sab dhan lutiye lelkai ho Ram,
>
> Bain ke hum ailiai chaukidar, chorba ke kaa keliyai ho Ram[144]

[You took an oath when you came here but you have forgotten that. What you will take with you to your in-laws or to your husband, when you have lost everything

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[144] Das, Maheshwar. *Maithili Nirgun - Ka leke Jaiba Sasurariya*. Accessed 22 January 2022. www.youtube.com/watch?v=GldeAf5k348

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here. The thieves have stolen all your money, you have come as guards in this country but see, you have done nothing to those thieves.]

Such discussions about the meaning of life and renunciation are also found in the songs of Gudariya baba who sings the legend of Gopichan. According to the legend, king Gopichan left his entire possessions and live all his life as a hermit. The singer also talks using the instrument as a character which listens and responds to the questions and comments on his responses. The story is one of the most tragic stories which relates to the sorrow of those parents who have lost their young sons. It is said that many youths from villages left their home and join the Nath movement, living the rest of their life as hermits. One of their dialogic songs says –

Dulra re bahini je duariya,

Maangi chaangi ke khayien re

Beta re bahini nagariya e Gopichan,

Maangi chaangi ke khayien re ki,

Dulra re bahini je duariya,

Bhuli na jahiyen ho ki,

Babu re gudakhodi ke rotiya,

Gopichan Gudaria (Source - Rudra)

Bhojan bahini karaavat ho ki,

Beta re tutli ahi chatkhoniya,

Bahini binarame baisaavat na re ki,

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The song depicts how Gopichan lives on begging, and one day reaches his sister's house. She with her heavy heart and tearful eyes offers him food and shelter.

Music Gharana: There have been established institutions of music schools in Mithila including Darbhanga Gharana, Panchgachhia Gharana, Banaili Gharana, Gaya Gharana, etc. in which Darbhanga Gharana has been famous for its tradition of Drupad Sangeet. Artists from different time-period like Mangin Khabas, Chhetipal Mallik, Ramchatur Mallik, Vidur Mallik, Anand Kumar Mallik, Prashant Mallik and other vocalists, Rameshwar Pathak (Sitar), Abdulla Khan (Sarod) and other instrumentalists are some of the many important personalities in these traditions along with the important associations of Bismilla Khan (Shahnai), Gauhar Jan (Khyal), Aziz Bakhs Maula (Marsia singer) and others[145] with these institutions at different points of time. These institutional practices of music gharana have a long tradition and a repertoire of work which is just mentioned here for reference and needs a separate study.

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[145] Jha, Praveen Kumar. *Hindustani Sangeet and Mithila*. Accessed 20 September 2021. www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2KAXaXqdlE&list=LL&index=12

Epos & Ballad are the songs portray the life of heroes, describe the glory, history, beauty of the land and the people etc. These lyrics, known as Katha-Gathas, give a detailed account of the incidents. Folklore performance of Nach, musical theatre and Women's Theatre, are also the important constituents of Maithili music. They have the epos and ballad as major performance content largely in the forms of story-telling called Mahrai, which have already been discussed in detail in a previous chapter on folklore. There are thousands of these Katha-gathas related to various festivals and auspicious occasions of Vrata – votive prayers/Upvasa as well as legends like Sama Chakeba, Sapta-Vipta, Jaya-Vishhar, Nal-Damyanti, Tusahari Puja, Vat-Savitri, Sati Bihula, Chathi Maiya Parmeshwari (the story around Chhatha Parva) and so many more. The Muslim community too have many such songs like Bakkho (nomads) Geet on several occasions or Marshiya on the occasion of their festival 'Muharram' playing Jharni, an instrument made of bamboo commemorating the martyrdom of Hasan-Hussain in the battle field of Karbala.

Marshiya – Jharni (Source: Samadia.com)   Bakho Gayan (Source: Mithirang Lok Tarang)

An example of Marshiya song below describes how a mother urges her son to fight for a good cause.

> Haaye ji, sona ke intwa se banailiyai mahjidwa heera moti lagale kevaare,
>
> Haaye ji, bajri kevadiya dhene amma jan pukaare peele babu dudh ke katorbe,
>
> Hum kaise dharu maiya dudh ke katorba, hum jaibau rainipur laran me,
>
> Mon se asis maiya hamra ke diau ne, jeet lebai aibki laran me,
>
> Katvo ne katbe babu marlo ne marbe, jeet lebai aibki laran me.
>
> Haaye ji, jekar seer pabiha babu okre seer moriha…
>
> Karchi ke maral babu kaachar-kuchar hoybe, tega ke maaral sapahiye…[146]

The song describes the situation when the warriors are ready to march for the battle. The mother of the warrior requests her son to have a bowl of milk but he says he cannot as he is ready to move. He requests her to give her blessings for the victory in the battle field. She blesses her son that nothing can harm him and wishes that he would definitely win. She urges him to destroy the enemy and says that if he dies in the battle field as soldier, a death of sword, he would be a martyr…

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[146] *Marshiya Gayan*. Accessed 5 February 2022. www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyH-F5ftLN0

Perspective on the Practice

The above overview and description of the musical practices of Mithila present the varieties of art in terms of not only the diverse genres of music but the excellence of their creators, practitioners and the promoters also. These songs and instrumental pieces of works depict, describe and celebrate almost every aspect of human-social life as well as inquire, explore, encipher and decipher the triad of human, nature and divine. Similar to the painting tradition, music is also deeply rooted in nature and use its elements to interpret the human emotions and sensibilities. The elements of natural life are used to interpret the personal-social-spiritual aspects of life as well. The common core of these two major traditions of painting and music in Mithila is the creator, the women as well as the cyclic and fluid creative process as described in the previous chapter, begins with certain observations of the world around or particular imagination inspired/affected by some motivating factors. That undergoes through an inner process and comes out as an artistic expression. The concept and perspective developed through the process build the understanding and strengthens the belief-system. The learning from the process enriches the subsequent cycle of the creative process further. Such creative process makes the bases and grounds of any art practice and subsequent tradition.

Semiotic Expression of Life

In batgamani, the most expressive songs of women, various symbols inspired from nature are used to depict women's semiotic expressions of love, union, separation, sexuality and so on. For example-

Jakhan gagan ghan garjat Sajni ge,

Suni hahrat jeev mor Sajni ge.

Prannath pardes gel Sajni ge,

Chit bhel chaan chakor Sajni ge.

Eksari bhavan hum kaamini Sajni ge,

Damini lel jeev mor Sajni ge.

[O my friend, when the dense cloud sky is roaring on this dark night, my heart starts to panic. My beloved is in a foreign country, my heart has become a Chukar bird for the moon. In this dark rainy night, I am alone with my desire in the house, alive for the sight of the lightning.]

In the above song, the intensity of separation in a rainy night is depicted through dense sky as mental state, roaring of clouds as distress, chukar bird as the heart of beloved for the moon as the lover and lightning as the sign of life. How in a dark cloudy, loud and frightening night, a sight of transient lightning gives the hope of life. Similarly, the below examples symbolise the human emotions at different levels. These batgamani songs are written by Vidyapati who took inspiration from

the folk music, wrote in the popular genres, followed the Commons' adherence to the symbols and facilitated it further.

Faral lavang dupat bhel sajni ge,

Phal-phool lubdhal daari,

Khoincha bhari toral fafra bhari toral,

Sej bhari del chhiriyay,

Phoolak dhamak pahun jaagal sajni ge rusi chalal pardes,

Barah barakh par lautal sajni ge,

Kakba lail sanes ohi kakba lay thakrab sajni ge,

Ruchi-ruchi kail seengaar,

Bhanahi Vidyapati gaol sajni ge,

Purushak nahi vishwaas…

[O my friend, when the clove bloomed with two-side open, the branch was laden with the flower and the fruit, I plucked them and scattered on the bed. The sound of flower had woken him up, he sulked and left for the foreign country. He has come back after twelve years, brought me a comb as gift, I'm combing my hair with that gift and embellishing myself heartily. Thus, Vidyapati says that the men are deceivers…]

The song with the concluding statement that the 'men are deceivers' illustrates that he is so self-centered that he cannot understand her desire. She sprinkles her love but he departs in disgust and distances for a long time. Now he has returned with a comb of his desire, she is combing, readying to fulfil his wish. In another song below, the beloved laments the separation -

>…Taruni bayas mohi beetal sajni ge,
>
>Pahun bisral mohi naame,
>
>Kusum phuli-phuli Maulali sajni ge,
>
>Bhamra lel bishraame,
>
>Chaanan bujhi hum ropal sajni ge,
>
>Hirday kori thal del,
>
>Naynahun neer pataaol sajni ge,
>
>Aakhir simmer bhel…

In the song, the lady is hurt that her juvenility is languishing and her beloved has forgotten even her name. That her youth is fading like a flower bloomed its fullest and then withered, but the beloved bumble-bee is sleeping. She regrets that she has mistaken, the love she sowed as the plant of a fragrant sandalwood in the mud she dug up from her heart, watered it with her tears but that has become a barbed simmer tree.

Chaanan bhel bisham sar re, bhushan bhel bhaari,

Sapnehu hari nahi aayal re, gokul giradhaari,

Ashgar thaadi kadam tar re, path herathi muraari,

Hari binu deha dagadh bhel re, jhaamar bhel sari,

Jaha jaha tohe jaahu udhav re, madhupur jaahu,

Chandra badan nahi jiwat re, wadha laagal bhaari,

Bhanahi vidhaapati gaawal re, sunu gunawati naari,

Aaj aawat hari gokul re, path chalu jhata jhaari…

The song portrays the grief of Radha caused due to the separation from her beloved Krishna. That the sandalwood she has applied to her body has become the poison, the jewellery she is wearing has become unbearable. Krishna has not come even her dream. She is standing alone under Kadam tree waiting for him without whom her body has become so igneous that her cloth is burnt. She warns Udhav, the messenger of Krishna to hurry up as she won't live longer and he would be guilty of the murder. Thus, Vidyapati says, listen O virtuous lady, hurry up, Krishna is coming today. In these above songs, the intensity of grief, longing, separation, aversion, regret has been symbolised in the form of natural elements and phenomena.

Kohbar songs are about the affairs in the bridal chamber. Similar to the Kohbar painting as discussed in the previous chapter, the songs describe different aspects of married life, the romance, beauty of love, union and so on using the symbols

derived from the nature and that connects the human life with the divine as seeking the blessings or the strength.

Ghar pachhuarba laung ker gachhiya, laung chubay aadhi raati he,

Laung ke chuni chuni sejiya sajaol, sej bhari del chhidiyaay he,

Taahi kohbar sutlani se Ramji dulha, sang me siya sukumaari he,

Ghuri sutu firi sutu subhe he kaniya subhe, ahun ghame bhijati chadari he,

Etba vachan jab sunlani kaniya subhe, rusi naihar chalal jaathi he,

Ek kos geli Sita dui kos geli, tesre me bhai gel saanjh he,

Kahan gelah kiye bhelah bhaiya re malahba, naiyaa san utaari dai paar he,

Din me khuabah sunnar chelhba machhariya, raati me odhayab mahaajaal he,

Chaan suruj san apan prabhu tejal, tohar boli moro ne sohay he,

Ek naiya aabay aajan bajan, dosar naiyaa aabay bariyaat he,

Tesar naiyaa falna dulhaa aayal, paan khua dhani manaol he,

Ghar pachhuarba me supari ke gachhiya, chatral chatral daari he,

Machiya baisal ahan nij he sasu, maalin beti det upraag he,

Apan putr rahite daanti dapati ditiyai, parputr daantal ne jay he…[147]

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[147] *Kohbar Geet*. Accessed 6 February 2022. www.mithiladharohar.blogspot.com

The song describes the affairs of the bridal chamber of the bride like Sita and the groom like Ram. There is a clove tree behind the house, the cloves drip at midnight. The cloves were scattered on the bed. In that chamber Ram slept along with Sita. 'You have slept and rolled up so intensely that the bed-sheet is wet by your sweat' - hearing such comment from her husband, Sita takes offence and leaves for her father's house. She travels one mile, then one more and in the third it is evening. She requests the fisherman to boat and help her go the other side of the river. The fisherman flirts with her and offers that he will serve the beautiful Chelhba fish every day and dress her up in a big fishnet at night. She replies that she has left her husband who is like sun and moon and that she does not like the flirt. Then comes three boats, the first boat is full of gifts, the second full of her husband's family and in the third, the husband comes and appeases her by offering betel to eat. There is a betel-nut tree behind the house, the branches are wide spread. The mother-in-law is sitting on a stool, the daughter of gardener complains that if it was her son did such thing, she would have scolded but how she can say anything to somebody else's son. In this beautiful song, there are many symbolic things derived from nature like betel, clove, betel-nut, fish, fishnet, sun, moon which depict the elements of romance, married life, the raillery and seduction by wife and husband.

Machiya baisal ahan kaniya se kaniya subhe,

Jhaarathi naami naami kesh he,

Palanga baisal ahan dulha se falna dulha,

Niharathi badani shareer he,

Jeho kichhu mangab dhani seho kichhu maangi lia,

Iho theek kohbarak reet he,

Ek ta mangai chhii prabhu dumreek fulba,

Dosar baaghak dudh he,

Baarah barakh hum nikunjvan seval,

Tahio nahi milal dumreek phool he,

Baarah barakh hum nikunjvan seval,

Tahio nahi milal baaghak dudh he,

Haate bajaar san sinur mangaayab,

Dunu mili bhogab sansaar he,

Haate bajaar san madhur mangaayab,

Dunu mili jodab sineh he,

The bride is sitting on a stool and combing her long famous hair. The groom is sitting on a bed nearby and gazing at her body. He tempts her saying that it is obvious in the bridal chamber that she can ask for any gift she wants. She teases him by asking for the rarest things like Dumree flower which nobody has ever seen and the milk of tigress that is also near impossible for the groom. The groom expresses his helplessness that he roamed around the jungles for twelve years but he did not find any of those two rare things. Then the bride lightens up the conversation by saying that it is fine to fetch vermillion from the local market and that both of them together will enjoy the world. And that it is fine to fetch sweet

from the local market and that both of them together will connect their love. In this song, the bride's ask of the two gifts, the two rare objects from nature symbolises that there is a limit to the extreme desire. The groom states his long efforts and helplessness in finding the extreme. Then bride comes up with a beautiful solution, the learning that love can unite them and modesty will help them enjoy the world. Such songs created by and sung by the common women symbolise the love and learning of life.

Depicting Alaukika (Psychic-spiritual dimension)

In every culture, the discussion around the creation of the universe, the supreme creator, and the creator-creation relationship is evident. The inter-connectedness between oneself and the ultimate self is also explored in a variety of ways. The three cores of this psychic-spiritual dimension form a triad of human, other-than human (nature), and divine. Nevertheless, human is also an important component of nature as a whole, one of the most conscious creations of the nature. Divine as creator or the process of creation is one such interpretation of human. The communion in the form of this triad is understood, decoded, and depicted in various aspects of the culture of Mithila as discussed in the previous chapter, the representation and discussion through painting. The music of Mithila also facilitates this communion and describes the inter-connectedness through various representation of the triad. The exploration of triad by decoding the alaukika, the divine or the intricacies of psychic-spiritual dimension and depicting it through the language of nature is found in the musical tradition.

In the nirgun songs including the ones composed and practiced by the followers of Kabir/ the Commons/the artists, the divine is frequently considered as beloved (husband), devotees consider themselves as women and Kabir their friend, the world as parental home and beyond the world, the imperceptible space as the in-laws' home. The discussion around the truth of life, life and death, the aspects of human emotion, the act of devotion to the divine, the ethical living and duty towards nature and divine are found in different songs. In this song, human life is described as an oath given to the divine.

Sakhiya he yaad aaju he kariyau, uhe din kaise he kabulen,

Kabule karaar kariyo he.

Hum sab ai jag men mosafir bani ke ailiyai,
Jag men batohiya bani ke ailiyai,

Gharba gira deliyai Sakhiya he

Sakhiya he, hoyte kaihl subah me, Dera jetai tut, Hatiya utariye jetai he

Keliyai jag men hum jakraa par bharosa

Koi nahi apnaa bhelai Sakhiya he

Sakhiya ne jahi din hetai bhet, jum ke sipahi se hamra

Bahute gajanma karite he hamra Sakhiya he.

…pichhan pachhteba, jahiya suganma jaltai Sakhiya he,

Sakhiya he kam dinma he Saheb, Saheb Kabir pichhan pachhteba,

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Jahiya suganma jalta he, jahiya suganma udta he.

Saheb Kabir sohar gabi ke suna delkai Sakhiya he,

Sakhiye he yuge yuge he kariyau, Sat kariyau,

Sat par chalbe kariyau sat par Sakhiya he. [148]

[O my friends, recall it today that how you took an oath that day. You took an oath you had an agreement. We all have come to this world as travelers as passengers. By the next morning, we would have lost our homes, our houses would be broken and the market place desolated. Whoever I trust in this world has deceived. O my friends, the day I would meet the messengers of death, they would clamour…you would regret the day when the parrot would be burnt, O my friends, only few days are left, says the lord Kabir, you would regret the day when the parrot would be burnt, the parrot would fly. Lord Kabir has sung us the sohar (birth song), O my friends, take oath and follow the path of truth.]

There are various symbols used in the song like an oath, agreement, travellers, passengers, lost homes, broken houses, desolated market-place, messengers of death, parrot burnt and fly and Kabir singing the Sohar. Life is considered a short-term contract with an oath to live a virtuous life and death as the end of that contract. Kabir urges the fellow human to recall and follow the path of truth. In some cases, the popular trends followed in Kabirpanth and other alternative faiths tend to follow the super

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[148] Das, Maheshwar. *Bhajan*. Accessed 22 January 2022. www.youtube.com/watch?v=srMbeex4aTQ

In the songs devoted to Shiva - Nachari, in which the devotees explain their helplessness to the Lord and Mahesbani, in which the story of Shiva and his family members are narrated, Shiva and his family are frequently personified and portrayed as the fellow beings by the devotees. The descriptions of Shiva, his wife Parvati (Gauri) and two sons Ganesh and Kartikey and their family affairs in the songs resemble the situation of any person/family/household of Mithila. For example- the depiction of marriage of Shiva and Gauri look like any marriage in Mithila in which the plight of Gauri is described as she ends up getting a horrible husband as the result of her long difficult ascetic practices and prayers, all that for a good husband.   How the scary feature of the groom terrifies people and because of that Narad (the mediator) is cursed. Some other songs describe the everyday life of Commons is metaphorically as Shiva's family life. In the song below, the pathetic condition of the house of Shiva-Gauri is described.

Na jaayeb, na jaayeb, na jaayeb he sakhi Gauri anganma,

Gauri anganma sakhi, Paarbati anganma,

Bahira sanpak maanrab banaaol, teliya del banhanma he,

Dhaman sanpak koro banaaol, ajgar ke del dharanma he, sakhi Gauri…

Harhara ke kaaraa-chharaa, karait ke laaol kanganma,

Paniyadaraari ke pahunchi laaol, dharba ke laaol dholanma he, sakhi Gauri…

Sugba saanp ke munri laaol, naag ke laayel jayshanma he,

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Chand-taaraa ke sheesha laaol, machhgiddhi ke abharanma he, sakhi Gauri…

[I won't go, O my friend, I won't go to Gauri's house. Her house is scary. The canopy at her hut is made of bahira (deaf) snake and roped with teliya snake. The sides of the roof is made of Dhaman snake and the ajgar (python) as the beam holds the roof at the center. Shiva has brought the armlet for Gauri made of Harhara snake, the bangles of Karait snake, the bracelet of Paniyadaraari snake and the dholna (drum-shaped necklace locket) of dharba snake. He has brought munri (ring) made of sugba snake, jayshan (ornament for forehead) of naag (cobra) snake, mirror of moon and star and abharan (ornament) made of machhgiddhi (snake-like fish)]

Gauri dauri dauri kahthin he mor bhangiya rusal jaay,

Bhangiya rusal jay re baurahba rusal jay, Se Gauri…

Aai ge maai par he parosin budh ke diya ne manaay,

Jn mora budh ne aauta naihar baisab jay re, baurahba rusal jay, Se Gauri…

Kundi fenklain sonta fenklain bashaa ke delain bhagaay,

Kanik bhang me der bhela sn hamra tejne jay re, baurahba rusal jay, Se Gauri…

Kaartik Ganpati jhadra kelain aapas me dunu bhay,

Bhang chhori k jhadra chhoraayal taabat gelaa paraay, baurahba rusal jay, Se Gauri…

Bhanahi Vidyapati sunu he Gaura bais rahu ghar jaay,

Daural daural apnahi aauta bhang ke chaat bulaay, baurahba rusal jay,

Se Gauri dauri dauri kahthin he mor bhangiya rusal jaay…

In the song, Gauri is running after Shiva. She is upset that her husband is offended and fuddling. She calls him a baurahba (insane) and bhangiya (one who always eat and remain in effect of cannabis or hemp). She is requesting her friends/neighbours to help appease her old man. Then she warns that if he didn't come back, she would leave and stay at her mother's house. She describes that Shiva was so furious that he threw the bridle and whip and drove his bashaa (ox) away. That all because she had shortly delayed preparing his cannabis drink. She further goes on explaining that both of their sons Ganesh and Kartikey were quarreling and she was trying to sort out, at the very moment, Shiva ran away. Vidyapati suggests Gauri to be calm and stay at home. Shiva would come back himself when he desperately missed the cannabis drink.

Such depiction of the house of Shiva in the first song and in second, the character of Shiva, the mightiest god as believed by the devotees, may seem quite strange. However, there may be different thoughts behind such depiction of Shiva-Gauri as ordinary people or in another way, as extra-ordinary aliens (the extreme situation). Through this, devotees describe the plight of the everyday life and plead or bring gods' attention towards them. These exaggerated descriptions in their songs metaphorically connect the devotees with the gods by imagining gods living

ordinary life like them, like a close companion whom they can make fun of, express their emotions to and share the sentiments with.

During the marriage ceremony in Mithila, there is a ritual called Jog that means connecting or union. For the union of the bride and groom at every level of mental, physical, psychological and social, various rituals and mystic activities are practiced. In the Kohbar painting, four identical images of Naina Jogin (protective one-eyed veiled goddess) are drawn on the four walls to protect the newly-weds from the evil eye. Naina-Jogin takes care of their privacy. 'Naina' means 'eye'. 'Jogin' signifies with the term 'Goddess'. Ensembles in a long skirt and a magnificent veil, she covers her half-face along with the right eye with that veil. Her left eye is the foremost focal point of her exposed face, with that she warns the newly-wed couple to act discreetly and intensifies the enigmatic ether of the Kohbar-ghar where the consummation of the marriage happens. The jog song is full of mysticism in which the reference of binding or subjugating the earth, sky, sea or mountain is mentioned. It describes how the impossible becomes possible through the Jog or song of enchantment - customs of sorcery during marriage or ways of hypnosis.

> Maai he saat bahin hum jogin Nainahu thiki jeth bahin,
>
> Maai he tinkahun sn jog sikhal tin bhuvan jog haankal,
>
> Maai he samudrahu baanh banhaol tain hum jogin kahaaol,
>
> Maai he tarhath dahi janmaylahun tain hum jogin kahaaol,
>
> Maai he sukhaayel gaachh panghelaun tain hum jogin kahaaol,
>
> Maai he baanjhik kokhi palatlahun tain hum jogin kahaaol,

Maai he bhanahi Vidyapati gaaol joginik ant na paaol…

Painting by Manisha Jha
(Source – Kailash Kumar Mishra)

In this jog song, the ladies including the Bidhkari (who leads the rituals in bridal chamber) sing the song as to save the new couple from the bad omen/evil eyes. The jogin (lady ascetic) boasts her knowledge of Tantra and art of mysticism. She says that she is seven sisters, the eldest of them is Nainahu who has taught her jog. The jogin says that she is called jogin because she can move the three worlds, bind the sea, make curd on her palm, convert a stubble tree into green and make an infertile woman bear child. Vidyapati says that nobody can fully understand such jogin. These jog songs narrate how the women, the elderly from the bride's family-

mother, aunt, etc. and her well-wishers possess and practice the divine/tantric power in favour of the bride. The sole objective of jog is to help the bride tame the groom so that she completely engrosses him. There are multiple references of the acts of sorcery and hypnosis –like serving the groom some incanted food or take out the cord of groom's headgear and sow it under the digging rod so that the groom is entirely bewitched. In the below song, the jogin proclaims that she has controlled the groom and if he at all moved off, he would definitely come back to the bride.

> Mai he hamrahu jn pahun tejtaah fal bujhtaah,
>
> Mai he baainh debani banisaar adheen bhay rahtaah,
>
> Mai he chaan suruj jankaa ugtaah ugi jhaptaah,
>
> Mai he nain nain jodal sineh falak nahi chhodtaah,
>
> Mai he naau dori jankaa ghumtaah ghumi autaah,
>
> Mai he makri debani ainthi dehari dhene rahtaah,
>
> Mai he bhanahi Vidyapati gaaol fal paaol,
>
> Mai he Gauri ke badhaun ahibaat sunnar bar paaol.[149]

[O mother, if my husband left me, he would face the consequence. I would trap him to be under my control. He would rise as moon and sun and hide. I have devoted my love eye-to-eye; he wouldn't leave the sky. Like the rope of a boat, he

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[149] Mishra, Dr. Kailash. 2018. *Maithili Jog Geet me Prem aa Tantrak Prabhav*. Accessed 19 February 2022 from www.facebook.com/kailashkumar.mishra/posts/10215113983940010

would wander but regress. I would screw the makri (leg loop of toddyman) so well that he would stick to me. Vidyapati says that the goal is achieved. O mother, may Gauri have eternal married life, I have got a handsome husband.] The song beautifully uses the metaphors like rising-hiding of sun and moon as a well-organized life, eye-to-eye as devotion of pleasure and happiness and sky as the world of love, or the boat and rope as a destined relationship.

Referring to the above discussion, the human emotions, thoughts, social living and the psychic-spiritual exploration of the divine are illustrated through the symbols derived from nature - its elements, attributes, objects and phenomena. These constituents of nature embody various aspects of human life and represent that through a nature's language. Obviously, human has developed their thought-process, ideas, system based on the essence of nature and took inspiration from the nature's settings. As discussed earlier and in the previous chapter, Mithila painting and music decode these constituents of nature and apply that language in their expressions, for example, the songs like batgamani or kohbar depict women's semiotic expressions of love, union, separation, sexuality and so on, 'the love she sowed as the plant of a fragrant sandalwood in the mud she dug up from her heart, watered it with her tears but that has become a barbed simmer tree.' In the nirgun songs, the dialogues with the divine and the discussion around the truth of life, death, the devotion to the divine, the ethical living and duty towards nature and divine are interpreted through different symbols like oath, agreement, travelers, parrot burnt and fly etc. The songs narrating lord Shiva and his family are personified as ordinary people uses the daily household chores metaphorically. The jog songs depict various rituals and divine/mystic activities practiced for the union of the bride and groom at all the levels of mental, physical, psychological and social.

Though this vast repertoire of art developed in ages owes to every creator of the art, the Commons and of course the biggest source of inspiration nature, the creator's psychic-spiritual journey as well as the essence of divinity, nevertheless the contributions of women are immense. Besides, the profound interaction with nature, and lived experience of natural and social life enables these creators to portray their emotions and thoughts through the aspects of nature. It may also be a quest for devising a parallel system of knowledge, other than the inaccessible so-called male-dominated mainstream, the knowledge system that is evolved, developed and expressed through a variety of mediums – the arts as evident in music, painting and different other forms.

Chapter 7

Social Fabric (Genealogical Records - Panji Prabandh)

Similar to a piece of fabric woven by using different arrangements of warp and weft of various types of yarn, a society is constituted by different units of individuals, families, and communities. The fabric of society is woven or structured and organized by the processes and norms. The social system and positioning of the units of society are part of that social fabric. The integrity of society can be metaphorically depicted as the compactness of the fabric called 'Gups' in Maithili which depends on how evenly or impartially the units of society are cohered. In Mithila, the underlying social structure is influenced by a number of factors, one of them is the genealogical basis practiced as the system of genealogical records called Panji Prabandh in Mithila. Though, these records refer to the lineage and primarily used for arranging the marital relationship between the families of particular communities, it has wider implications on the society including the practice of the concept of purity of blood, high-born status and related social stratification. In this section of the study, the influence of the Panji system on wider society, the extent of its role in framing the entire social fabric as well as the extent of inter-community inclusion, harmony, and acceptance, have been analysed.

Mithila has the tradition of genealogical record-keeping, popularly known as Panji Prabandh, a practice similar to some of the other cultures. The genealogical basis of structuring the sections of the society in Mithila has had wider implication for the knitting of its social fabric. The book of genealogical records is called Utedh

Pothi and the record keeper is Panjikar or Panjiyar. Though the traces of genealogical discussions are found in ancient Mithila, a formal framework was developed in the 14th century CE (1326 CE) under the reign of King Harsingh Dev, as evident historically. There are more than four lakh genealogical records available, the oldest of which range from 300 to 700 years old. The records were once documented by the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU) from United states of America. Recently, the National Mission for Manuscripts (Ministry of Culture, India) has started a process of digitizing the Panji.

Although decaying and discontinued by many communities, Panji is a living heritage being practiced among the Brahmans and Kayastha (Karn) communities of Mithila. The families of the potential bride and groom consult the Panjikar for the match-making who refers to the records and prepares the consent document 'Siddhant Patra' or 'Aswajan Patr' (not a kith and kin). There have been some particular venues for the annual congregation of Panjikars and the families of potential bride and groom, Saurath Sabha Gachhi (Madhubani) is one of the prominent ones. Utedh was the basis of endogamic practice since the pre-medieval period among Brahman, Kayastha, Vaishya, Kshatriya, Dusadh and others[150] some of which later withdrew due to various reasons including frequent exogamic marriages among Kshatriya. It can be seen as a Genome mapping book called Utedh and a registration system as well. The notion behind the practice was to preserve the purity of blood/lineage (and caste), for which a rigorous categorisation of people and families of those communities was done.[151] However, there are instances when some of these categories were changed in favour of the powerful.

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[150] Ram, Dr. Mahendra Narayan. *Mithilak Amurt Sanskriti - Panji Prabandh*. Seminar. Achhinjal. 02 September 2018. Accessed 20 February 2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgxEBhGpy5M

[151] Thakur, Gajendra. Et Al. 2009. *Genome Mapping, 450 AD to 2009 AD – Mithilaak Panji Prabandh*. Delhi: Shruti Prakashan. Pages 0.1-0.2

In this chapter, the historical account and the factors behind its initiation, the then socio-political scenario together with various changes are examined. The extent of the role of Panji Prabandh in structuring Mithila's society is discussed along with the aspects of social stratification within and beyond the periphery of the particular practicing community. The influence of the Panji system on wider society and the extent of its role in framing the entire social structure is also analysed further in this chapter. For instance, the Brahman community was earlier scheduled in five strict hierarchical sections of Aeyaant, Baarant, Maddhyama, Bhrashta, Atibhrashta, later known to as Shrotriya (Soit), Yogya, PanjiBaddh, Vansdhar, and Jaiwaar respectively. There are further complex classifications based on Gotra (Lineage), Mool (Origin), Mool-Gram (Village), Painjh (awarded titles), and so on. 'Bikowa' (sold groom) and 'Farak' (difference) - paying an amount of money to compensate for inter-section marriages among Brahmans, etc. were some of the examples of social differences. Similarly, the influence on the overall society through the synthesis of the system based allegedly on 'Purity', 'Stringent Social order', 'Domination by control', etc. are important in this regard.

Structure of the Practice

The genealogical records and documentation in Mithila started as a systematic exercise and a proper system of execution under the patronage of the king. The historical account presents the factors behind its initiation and development. With time, various modifications have happened according to the changing socio-political scenario or to meet certain needs.

Anecdotal reference: One of the major sources of transmission of knowledge and beliefs have been the stories everywhere in the world and so does in Mithila. Many of them are contested and merely based on any valid grounds, however they still play a major role in Commons' world of exploration. According to a popular story which is said to be the reason behind the initiation of Panji system, there was a priest named Harinath Mishra lived in the village Satghara. Once, being upset of his brothers quarrelling and humiliating behaviour, he left home and didn't come back for long. His wife took an oath to bring her husband back and started doing a special worship (Vrata) to lord Shiva. She would come to the temple of lord Shiva at the neighbouring village of Devhar everyday, no matter how bad the weather was. There was a jungle on the way where a Chandal[152] named Bhikhna used to spot her. Bikhna was said to be from an untouchable lower community of either Dom or Dusadh. On an evening when the lady came to the temple for the worship, it started a heavy raining. She could not return home. Bhikhna saw her and attempted to take advantage of her. It is said that a cobra came from somewhere and saved her. She took shelter in the temple whole night. A rumour about the lady and Bhikhna spread out. After few days, the priest came back. When he heard that his wife was away from home one whole night and had relationship with another

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[152] *Chandal* - A person considered as impure or an outcaste or the lowest category of humankind.

man. He blamed her and kicked her out of the house. She approached the king of Mithila Harsingh Dev. He discussed the case with the learned persons who made the verdict that she would   have to take a chastity test. Three leaves of peepal tree to be kept on her palm and a hot piece of iron to be kept on those leaves, if she is burnt, she would be guilty, if not she is pure. She had to keep uttering a mantra (psalm) 'Nah Chandal gamini' (I do not have any physical relation with Chandal) throughout the test. She got burnt and declared guilty. The story continues with the mother of poet Vidyapati came into scene, requested the king to allow another test. The same test was administered along with a little change in the mantra 'Naham Sau pati atirikter chandal gamini' (I do not have any physical relation with Chandal other than my husband). This time, she did not get burnt and declared not guilty and pure. It was surprising for the learned persons who investigated this issue further. Later, they found out that the close ancestors of the priest Harinath Mishra were blood related and thus the offspring of that entire priest family was declared corrupted, impure or Chandal. This incident is believed to be the reason behind the initiation of a formal system of Panji Prabandh to have the records of marriages and to maintain the purity.

Panjikar_Source-Mithila Dharohar

Another story about an incident when the Brahman community gathered to structure the way categorisation of their community. A yagna followed by a feast was organised and everybody was invited. The Brahmans who reached without performing even their daily chores were categorised as Nimn or Atibhrasta (highly corrupted) – fourth category, the third category Jaibaar was given to those who came after taking bath and a little daily worship, Jogya who were the learned ones but did not perform their daily chores given the second category and finally the first category Srotriye, the Brahmans who performed all their daily chores, worship and recitation of Vedas.[153] These stories though popular seem to be based on superficial grounds. These are travelled through word of mouth and become the day-to-day references among the Commons. They have their own place of being the popular narrative. One needs to check the validity of these references before taking them into account.

Ancient historical / mythological references

The philosophical treatise 'Tantra Vaartik' by the Mimansa philosopher Kumaril Bhatt' from 7th century mentions one of the ancient most genealogical references called 'Samuh Lekhya' (collective records) that which the learned people would keep as records of their origin (32 generations) and introduce themselves accordingly. A verse in Tantra Vartik mentions that the noble people save their purity with great effort. Thus, the collective records are developed, which help to

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[153] Kamal, Kashyap. 22 November 2020. *Genealogical Stratification in Mithila with Reference to Panji -Prabandha*. Webinar. IGNCA Ranchi. Accessed 20 February 2022. www.facebook.com/IGNCA/videos/696899794598336

find the qualities and dis-qualities of persons and families to decide the marital relations.

> 'Vishishtenaiv hi prayatnen mahakuleenah parikshanti aatmaanam anenaiv hi hetuna rajabhibrahmanaishch swa pitr-pitamahadi paramparya-vismarnarth samuhlekhyanipravartani tath ach pratikulam gun-dosh smarnatadanurupa prabhriti-nirvatayo drishyate' – (Tantravartik, Adhyay 1, Pad-2, Sutra 2k- vartik)[154]

A verse from Vishnu Puran mentions the rule for marital relation that five generations of mother and seven generations of father from both sides of bride and groom should be avoided,

> Panchmi Maatri pakshah pitr pakshansh Saptami,
>
> Grihasthi uddhet kaanyaan Nyaayen vidhi naa nirpaa,
>
> Tat Panchmi Saptami maten vyakhyayen,
>
> Panchme saptame chaiv yeshah vavaahikaa kriya,
>
> Kriya Para apihite patita suddh tagata…

Similarly, there are other similar references mentioned in Shatpath Brahman, Vajasney Samhita, Taiteriye Samhita discussing purity, Mithila Tatwa Vimarsh by Mahamahopadhyay Parmeshwar Jha, Malti Madhav Teeka, Atharvaved – Vanshvartika, Banbhatt's work Harshcharit which describes the lineage of

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[154] Thakur, Gajendra. Et Al. 2009. *Genome Mapping, 450 AD to 2009 AD – Mithilaak Panji Prabandh*. Page 0.2

Vatsyayan including the quality/disquality as well in the works of Manu, Ved Vyas, Gautam, Tulsidas etc.

Saurath_Sabha_Source-Wikimedia

Other historical references

The system of genealogical records of the 7th century Mithila, later adopted by Bengal and Assam was remodified.[155] By the 14th century, the practice of keeping family Samuh Lekhya was completely declined and there were many discrepancies found in social life. The above-mentioned stories are supposed to present that crisis. In 1326, with the help of King Harsinghdev, the learned people of Mithila started structuring the practice. The state made the rule that these introductory records would be kept by the experts (Panjikar) and they could refer the records of the family of prospective bride and groom and issue the 'Aswajan Patr' or 'Siddhant Patr' that approves that they are not blood -related. Without such certification, the marriage would be illegitimate. These experts visited the households and collected the existing data including the information of Gotra (clan), Pravar (relation with sage who wrote the part of Vedas), location of original residence of ancestors (Mool), the Vedas and the related branches the family was connected with. Whoever had more information available about their family got to have more advanced records especially the intellectuals. Gunakar Jha of Mahindrapur Pandua mool was given the responsibility to work on the records of Brahman community. Similarly, Shankardatt was assigned for Karn Kayastha and Vijaydatt for Kshatriya community. There were 42 Sabha sthal (places where marriage negotiations were held with the help of Panjikars) established in four zones of Darbhanga, Saharsa, Purnia, Sitamadhi including Saurath, Partapur and Sajhua (present Madhubani district), Bangaon, Mahishi, Baluahi (present Purnia district), Fatehpur, Suksena, Khamhaur and Kalabarua (present Sitamdhi district),

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[155] Jha, Pankaj Kumar. *National Culture and the Imagined Community: 'The Panji Prabandha of Mithila'*. Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol. 64, 2003, Pages 1198-1203

Sasaula and others. Almost all of these Sabha sthal are dead, except Saurath where a preservation initiative by the state and community is being done.[156]

System of records

The records include the information like Gotra, Pravar, Mool, Mool-Gram (changed location of residence), Painjh (the title given to a family which is the name of a learned person associated with that family), etc. The 20 Gotras among the Maithil Brahman include the seven most of them belong to Shandilya, Vatsa, Kashyap, Savarn, Parashar, Bhardwaj, Katyayan, and the rest thirteen Garg, Kaushik, Alambukaksh, Krishnatrey, Gautam, Maudgalya, Vashishth, Kaundinya, Upmanyu, Kapil, Vishnuvriddhi, Tandi and Jatukarn. These Gotras are named after the male sages which are believed to be the first person of the related lineage. More than 180 Mool and 375 Moolgram associated with these gotras are found, e.g., the Shandilya gotra has mool like Sarisab, Mahua, Bhator, etc. Karn Kayastha has just one gotra Kashyap across the community. Their records are studied based on 362 mool. According to Varnaratnakar, kshatriya belong to 62 Kula (lineage).[157] Panji describes the blood relation of bride-groom, assures that both of them are 1) not from the same gotra, 2) not from the same prabar, 3) not less than 6 generation from groom and bride's father side and 5 generation from their mother side, 4) not from mother's village and 5) not the children of kathmam (maternal uncle's wife's brother). Panjikar refers to the records and issue Aswajan Patr. Among Srotriye Brahman, the Adhikaar mala is issued in which Panjikar identifies which families

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[156] Ram, Dr. Mahendra Narayan. 2 September 2018. *Mithilak Amurt Sanskriti - Panji Prabandh*. Seminar. Achhinjal. Accessed 20 February 2022. www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgxEBhGpy5M

[157] Thakur, Gajendra. Et Al. (2009). *Genome Mapping, 450 AD to 2009 AD – Mithilaak Panji Prabandh*. Pages 0.1-0.6

the family of bride can approach for the marriage to. The Panji or Utedh describe the complex structure of related communities and subsequent changes with time.

The type of record keeping has gone through different development, which is discussed further in the document. For example- the Brahman community divided into five categories as mentioned earlier have been named as Aeyaant, Baaraant Madhhyamaa, Bhrastaa and Ati-bhrashtaa or later Shrotriya, Yogya, Panjeebaddh, Vanshadhar and Jaiwaar respectively. According to the below verse from Smriti, the highest manifestation of Brahmanism was called 'Shrotriya'.

> "Janmanaa braahmano gyeyah sanskaaraad dwija-uchchyatay Vidyayaa yaati vipratwam tribhih shrotriya uchchyatay".

Shrotriya or Soit classified into 34 Mools include Aeyaant, Baaraant or Shrotriya and Yogya (20 mools). It also includes two Madhyamaa Mools named Surgane and Ekhare and one Atibhrashtaa Mool named Fanebaar was raised to Shrotriya status because of the interference of Royal families when they got marriage relations with these three Mools. Yogya or Jog is the category of those Shrotriya (Aeyaant and Baaraant) who got married to the lower Brahman communities. Yogya also includes the elevated three Madhyamaa mools of Baliase-Narsaam (of Salempur and Ranitol), Digho Sannahpur (of Singhwara) and Belauche-Sudai (of Banu Chhapra, Betia). Panjibadh comprises of the 14 Madhyamaa Mools, also known as Bhalmaanus. The Panjeebadh frequently intermarried with Yogya and aspired for the latter position. Those Yogya Brahmans were also called Bikaua (one who sell himself) as they were marrying for money which they developed as a profession, multiple marriage to the daughters of lower Brahmans, for example, Arjun Jha Bikaua from Babhangama had 40 marriages. Such people who were adorned with a Paainj but were lower than the Shrotriya and Yogya were called

Panjeebadh. Vanshdhar category consists of those Brahmans who were Shrotriya but had fallen low by marrying out of the 34 Mools, for example - Maander-Kataiyaa – (Maander being an Ayaant Mool and Kataiyaa depicting the low marriage and change of location of residence – Mool Gram. This category was placed higher than the Jaiwaar because of having a male lineage from the Aeyaant and Baaraant. Vanshdhar were also awarded with a Painjh and was thus elevated to the rank of a Panjibadh, for example - Hariambe-Aahil of Bishnupur in Purnea. Jaiwaar Brahmans are those lower than the first 34 and were initially recorded as Bhrastaa and Ati-bhrastaa at the initiation of the Panjee-Prabandh and mentioned in groups such as la-da-fha-dha meaning Lagurdah, Dahibhat, Fanandah (fanebaar) and Dhanauj. Out of these Fanebaar was promoted to the status of a Panjeebadh and later to that of Shrotriya when Maharaja Kameshwar Singh of Darbhanga Raj married a daughter from the house of Fanebaar. A Brahman without a Painjh is considered as Jaiwaar, for example - Nikutwaar Chunapur or Tapanpuriye Mangrauni.[158]

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[158] Sinha. Girijanand. 2009. *Panjee-Prabandh and the Caste-system among the Maithil – Brahmans.* Mithila and Maithil. Accessed 16 April 2022. www.girijanandsinha.blogspot.com

Documentation of Panji

There have been seven types of Panji including Mool, Shakha, Gotr, Patr, Dushan, Utedh and Aswajanya Patr Panji. Mool Panji was common to all. Shakha Panji was made especially for Soit, Jog and Panjibadhh. Gotr Panji had all the gotra and ancient mool mentioned. Patr Panji started recently which has all the Moolgram mentioned. Dushan Panji gives information of the decline in lineage. (A reference of Dushit Panji – the confidential records of mentally ill children, is also found). Utedh Panji has detailed information. Only few Panji has names of women mentioned including in Rasadh-Arariya. The scripts of these Panji are largely Tirhuta/Mithilaakshar, Kaithi as well as there are Sanskrit verses. Some of the related books are available including Mandar Mulak Pustak (1690-1710 CE) by Pandit Raghudev Jha, Shakha Pustak (1770-1780 CE) by Panjikar Pandit Devanand Jha (both on talipot), and others.

Prachin Panji (Source-videha.com)

Moolgram Panji (Source-videha.com)

Several inter-caste/inter-religion relationships or unknown relationships are documented in Dushan Panji (said to be accepted by the society). For example, the great Nyaya philosopher Gangesh Upadhyaya, famous for his treatise Tatva Chintamani, was born after 5 years of his father's death, the below tables show this.

खौआल श्रीकर सुत दिवाकर विवाह बहेराढ़ी गांगु सुत दोक विवाह सकौना गोपाल सुत गौरी पतिक विवाह दिधोय माधव सुत जगाईक विवाह छादनसँ तत्व चिन्तामणि कारक गंगेशक वल्लभा चर्मकारिणी पितृ परोक्षे पञ्च वर्ष व्यतीते तत्व चिन्तामणि कारक गंगेशोत्पत्ति सोदरपुर गोविन्द सुत परशुरामक विवाह अलयसँ गादू सुत श्रीनाथक विवाह माण्डरसँ अफेल सुत गादूक विवाह पनिचोभ सँ विद्यापतिसुत रमापतिक विवाह	रजकक कन्या हड़िनी रूद्रमतिक पुत्रीक सन्तानक लागिमे छलन्हि चर्मकारिणी मेधाक सन्तानक लागिमे छलन्हि

Source - Genome Mapping (450AD to 2009 AD) – Mithilaak Panji Prabandh / 0.44

४९.

१८८/२	चर्मकारिणी	माण्डर	वभनियाम	छादन	
तत्त्चचिंतामणि कारकगंगेश	छादनगंगेशक	नाँई	*रत्नाकरक-मातृक(अज्ञात)*	गंगेश	
	वल्लभा	भवाइ	माहेश्वर		
			जीवे		

Source - Genome Mapping (450AD to 2009 AD) – Mithilaak Panji Prabandh / 0.29

Another example as per the table below, is the family of Bhavnath (Sarisav Mool) His son was Kamalnayan and grandson was Kishai who got married to the daughter of Gangadhar. Gangadhar's father was Chamru from Valiyaas Mool who married to a girl (unknown from different caste), further Gangadhar's daughter married to Nathu (Sarisav Mool) and got the son Visho, Visho's daughter married to Gangu (Sakradhi Mool) and had son Goge, Goge's daughter married to Kanh (Panichobh Mool) and had son Rud, Rud's daughter married to Helu (Darihara Mool) and had son Chand, Chand's daughter married to Horai (Pali Mool) and had son Ram whose maternal side is unknown. Ram's daughter married to Chand (Narwal Mool) and has son Devdhar who is supposed to be pure after 6th generation.

१.

सरिसव १७८/१	वलियास चमरू गंगाधरक मातृक	सरिसव	सकराढी	पनिचोभ	दरिहरा	पाली	नरवाल
भवनाथ		नाथू	गांगू	कान्ह	हेलू	होराई	चान्द
कमलनयन किशाई	*अज्ञात २३८॥०५*	विशो	गोगे	रूद	चान्द	*रामक मातृक*	देवघर

Source - Genome Mapping (450AD to 2009 AD) – Mithilaak Panji Prabandh / 0.44

Similarly, there are many other references of unknown marital relationships including relationship with persons from different castes.[159]

Generally, each of the records is kept on a 15 inches x 4 inches paper on which there is a hole on the left to bind it with a Shadyantri cord. Earlier, basha paper (handmade made of bamboo, sourced from Nepal) was used. For its sustain longevity, the ink used was made of the blood of male buffalo put in bamboo and mixed with alum and other ingredients which helped retain it for minimum 1000 years. The area of Mithila is prone to natural calamity of flood or fire which created problem time to time. Ganesh Vandana (prayer) and different pictures, marriage details in tabular form, various doha (couplet), sloka (verse), patrachaar (letters), Jyotish (astrological) terms, etc. are found on the Panji.[160]
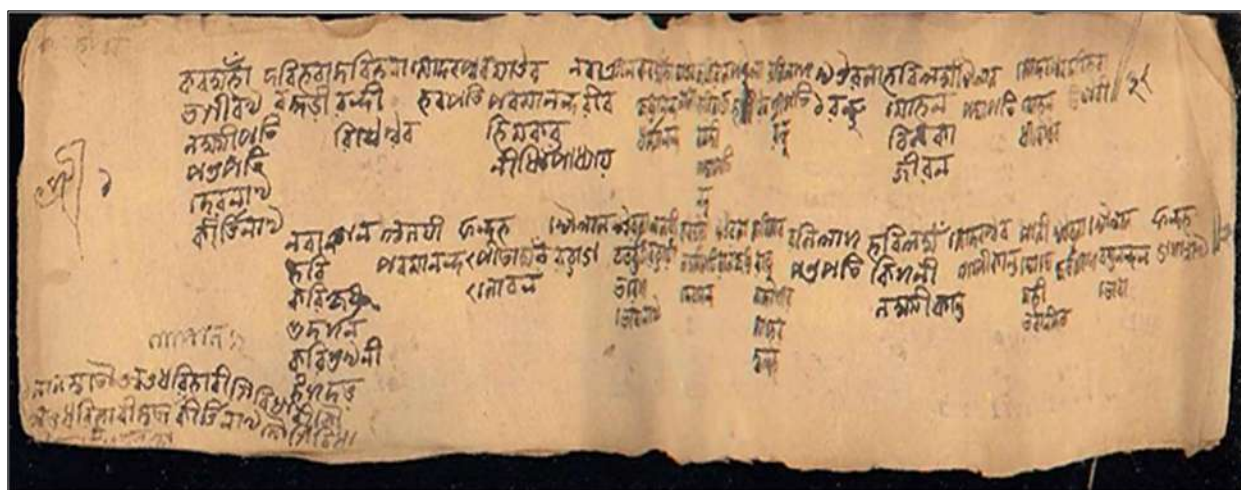
Utedh Panji (Source-videha.com)

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[159] Thakur, Gajendra. Et Al. (2009). *Genome Mapping, 450 AD to 2009 AD – Mithilaak Panji Prabandh*. Pages 0.7-0.44

[160] Das, Dr Bhairav Lal. 22 November 2020. *Genealogical Stratification in Mithila with Reference to Panji -Prabandha*. Webinar. IGNCA Ranchi. Accessed 20 February 2022. www.facebook.com/IGNCA/videos/696899794598336

Genealogical records in other communities

Kshatriye and Vaishya communities though had written records earlier, have discontinued these practices. Rajput Panji, Muslim Panji, Suri Panji, etc. existed at some point of time. Vinod Panjikar, Umesh Panjikar, etc. from Madhubani are from the family of Panjikars kept records of Suri (Vaishya) community.[161] Communities other than Kshatriye, Vaishya, Brahman and Kayastha, do not have any formal written system of records but have a tentative system to trace the lineage which is called 'Deeh Farichhab', for example, in Dusadh community, Surja, Magadhiya, Kanaujia, Nunia, etc. are different gotra. An example of Deeh of a person Jagdish Paswan is 'Agam Paani me baisal chhii, aa barah paseri saabe kharrai chhii' which means, a nomad who stays for few years and then move. Similarly, Mallah communities have sub-caste like Kevat, Nonia, Chauhaan, Son, etc. Dom communities have Agamkuiya, Kothiya, Kalyanpuriya, Goraita, Magahiya, etc. They also avoid five generations of father-side and mother-side when setting a marriage. In these communities, the terms sub-caste or gotra are used interchangeably.[162] Other experts mention about a Triveni conference held in early 20th century, when three castes changed their surname/profession. There are different references related to the Dusadh community, Mahavir Paswan mentions five gotras of Dusadh including Kaambhar, Magahiya, Palbaar, Kurmi amd Kothiwaar. According to Brijlal Ram, 7 gotras of Dusadh including Surjaha,

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[161] Das, Dr Bhairav Lal. 22 November 2020. *Genealogical Stratification in Mithila with Reference to Panji -Prabandha*. Accessed 20 February 2022.

[162] Ram, Dr. Mahendra Narayan. 2 September 2018. *Mithilak Amurt Sanskriti - Panji Prabandh*. Seminar. Achhinjal. Accessed 20 February 2022

Magadhiya, Kanaujiya, Kurna, Pahilbaar, Silohiya or even 9 gotras. Similarly, Mallah has 33 sub-castes and Dom has 30 gotras.[163]

Common debates around Panji system

Panji system is quite a complicated system with a vast range of details. The expert says that there is no any problem in Panji but in its practice. It was found important in structuring of society. The concept of nobility in Mithila is said to be inspired from the Kuleen Tantra of Bengal established by the king of Bengal Ballal Sen (1158-1179) who with a political motive of stratification categorised 8 higher Brahman and 16 lower Brahman. A rigid stratification divided every community into smaller units and placed an unethical hierarchy like the categories among Brahmans or categories of Kayastha into Pachhmaahaa (from the west), dakhinaaha (from the south), etc. as well impact of the system on other communities. The genealogical practices further caused the ill effects like Bikaua - Kuleen vivah (noble marriage by a person of high origin with many women and thus if husband died, there are examples of as many as 70 women become widows), Dowry, child marriage and other types of caste/gender-based exploitation like categories of high family/low family, Bahu vivah (polygamy), etc. All the dynasties of Mithila like Karnat, Oinvaar, Khandwalkya, Karnyaya, etc. all adopted the Panji and used it for their political purposes. King Tantranath Singh kidnapped Srotriye boys for his daughter's marriage to elevate his genealogical status. The kings were outcasted after one of them crossed sea (in 1929-30) to

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[163] Kamal, Kashyap. 22 November 2020. *Genealogical Stratification in Mithila with Reference to Panji -Prabandha*. Webinar. IGNCA Ranchi. Accessed 20 February 2022.

attend the conference in England.[164] Women were highly exploited in this system. Srotriye enjoyed the high privilege and high category, thus many women faced child marriage with old male and became early widow. [165] Though the system and related social structure have various contradictory notions which influenced every section of society directly or indirectly especially the criticism of the perception of human on genealogical basis, harsh categories and discriminatory criteria, many people are in favour of preserving the Panji documents and many other like to re-establish and promote the entire system as well. These aspects are discussed further in this document.

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[164] Das, Dr Bhairav Lal. 22 November 2020. *Genealogical Stratification in Mithila with Reference to Panji -Prabandha*. Webinar. IGNCA Ranchi. Accessed 20 February 2022.
[165] Mishra, Dr Kailash. 22 November 2020. *Genealogical Stratification in Mithila with Reference to Panji -Prabandha*. Webinar. IGNCA Ranchi. Accessed 20 February 2022. www.facebook.com/IGNCA/videos/696899794598336

Perspective on the Practice

Genealogy has been discussed for edges in all over the world, including its linkages with social-cultural, medical science and philosophical domains of knowledge and practices. In socio-cultural domain, how the socio-cultural position of an individual is defined. In medical science, such study is done to track the history of disease in the family. In philosophy, human evolution, development of ethics or the history of philosophy is traced and discussed. How the morality is influenced by the changing power-relation by looking at development of morality vis-a'-vis human evolution. The works of philosophers like Nitsey and Focault – 'Discipline and Punish' and 'Genealogy of morals' respectively can be referred to in this regard. In social life, the records of lineage are kept in different form which help to track the blood relation between generations and genetic analysis. In Mithila, it is in the form of Panji (book). There are other ways found across the world including the use of number system and geometrical structure, for example - pedigree chart which follows the shape of two legs of Crane bird found in Australia which is used to keep genealogical records in United States of America. There are family chart/family history found in the United Kingdom. Genogram is a picture method which describes family relation and medical history to track psychological factors and hereditary model. DNA testing is the new method to track the genetic structure and genetic relationship, basically, through the identification of three types of DNA every human has got – Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) which provides the details of mother side, Y- chromosome based DNA gives the information of father side and Autosomal DNA finds out 22 other DNAs (none gender) to wider kinship.

Kinship Diagram Template (Source- lucidchart.com)
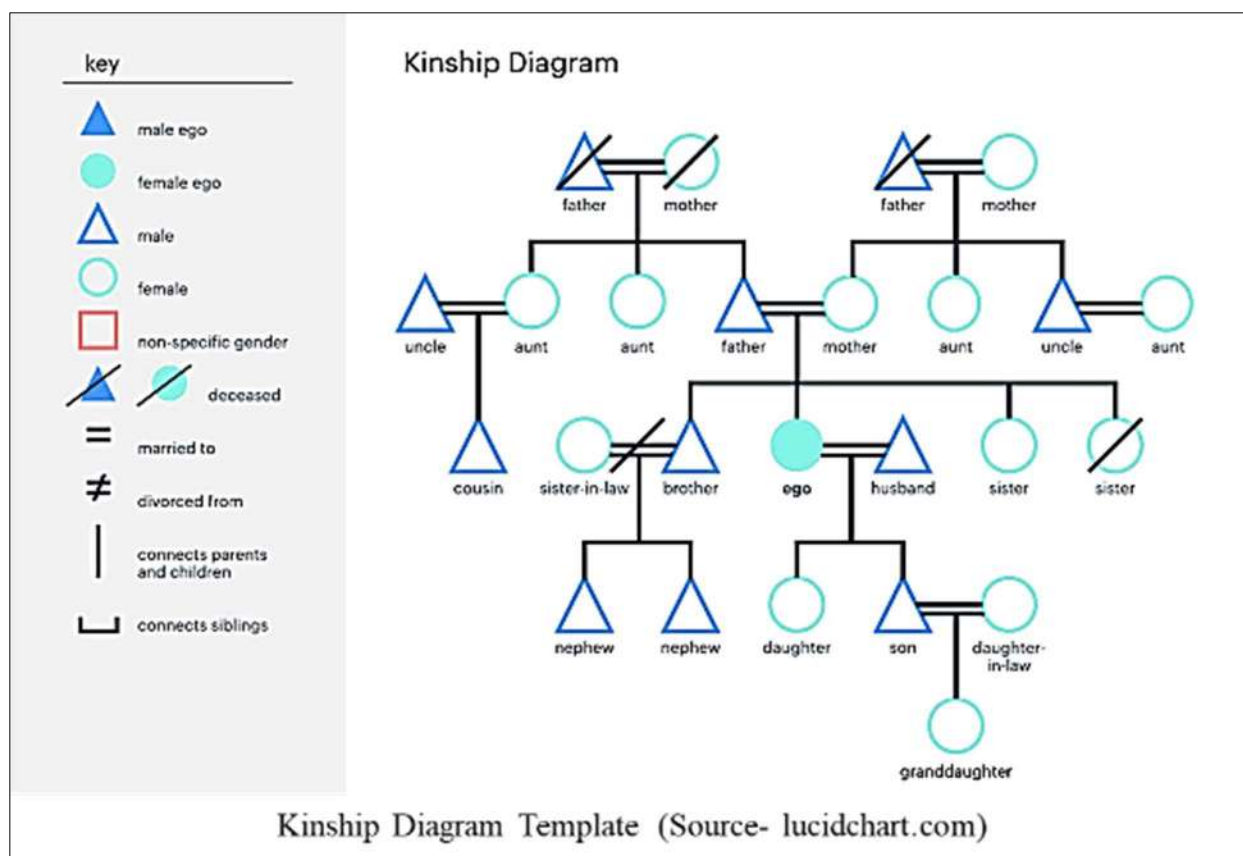
References of genealogy in history include the recent mention in Guinness Books world record of longest genealogical record of the philosopher-teacher Confucius from China. The record includes the information starting from his birth in 551CE and his family history of 2500 years, 86 generations as well as 2 million members.[166] In the USA, the genealogical study by John Farmer in 19th century was to track the status of migrants. In India, the pilgrimage like Haridwar and Kurukshetra have Hindu genealogical records. The Genealogical Society (GSU) of Utah, USA has microfilmed Hindu pilgrimage records for Haridwar and several other Hindu pilgrimage centres. Priests (pandits) located at each site would record the name, date, home-town and purpose of visit for each pilgrim. These records

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[166] *Confucius' family tree sets record for world's largest*. 5 November 2015. Central News Agency. Accessed 17 April 2022. www.taiwannews.com

were grouped according to family and ancestral home. The holdings by GSU include Haridwar, Kurukshetra, Pehowa, Chintpurni, Jawalapur and Jawalamukhi. GSU has microfilmed the genealogical records of Mithila as well as various Islamic marriage records of Uttar Pradesh as well.[167] National Archive at Delhi has information about the migrants to India like Jews, Parsi, etc.

On biological front and in relation to medical science, a study among the Pakistani community at Bradford (United Kingdom) concludes that the number of babies born with birth defects in Bradford is nearly double the national average. The study found this was largely because of marriages between first cousins in the Pakistani community. Consanguineous marriage accounted for nearly a third of abnormalities in a study of more than 11,300 babies.[168] The core finding is confirmation that consanguineous marriage is a major risk factor for Congenital abnormalities (CAs).[169] Medical science describes this situation as among the blood related parents, the probability of accumulation of defective DNA is high. This angel needs to be studied separately and in relation with the theory of evolution by Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882) and The Genetic Theory by Gregor Mendel (1822-1884).

Considering these aspects of genealogical records, Panji system of Mithila has some valid grounds for practice and its preservation, however there are various human-social issues being raised also. The speciality of Panji lies in the uniqueness of the documentation and effort of the people associated. These records are a repertoire which can help explore the history, society, literature of the related

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[167] Husainy, Abi. (2017). *Tracing your Asian Roots on the Indian subcontinent*. Accessed 17 April 2022. www.bbc.co.uk

[168] *Bradford study finds higher birth defect risk in married cousins*. 4 July 2031. Accessed 17 April 2022. www.bbc.com

[169] *Cousin marriage and congenital anomalies in a multiethnic birth cohort*. (2013). Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. Volume 43 Issue 3. Page 229

period, etc. These are the range of records of Commons unlike the historical documents which tend to be made for the powerful only. The start of such social system may have been some scientific bases through the ancient trial-n-error method which is evident in other cultural and livelihood practices like medicines, food, housing etc. The criticism of the system at socio-cultural front is the stratification based on the ideas of structuring the individual life and its social positioning based on the genealogical idea, popular narratives related to the synthesis of the social system, Purity of lineage, Endogamy, High-born status including Kuleentavaad (nobility), stringent social order based on the categories of Kul (lineage), Painjh (titles), caste, sub-caste, high/low status, intra-community discrimination and its wider impact on the society at large by establishing the stratified inter-community structure or the possible political discrimination by the kings/powerful through the idea of divide and rule. The impact on people, the extent of inclusion and acceptance and changing social life are worth a discussion.
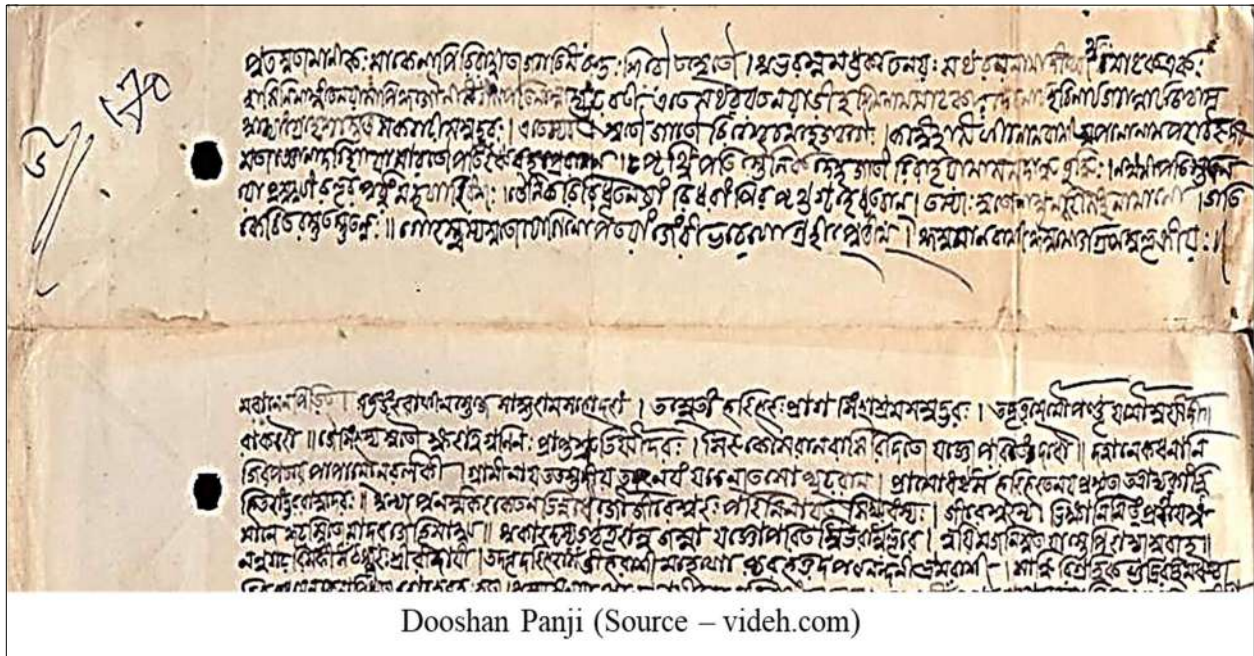
Dooshan Panji (Source – videh.com)

Furthermore, any discussion on the ground of genealogy has wider implications, for example, the disputes related to National Records of Citizens (NRC) which started in Assam or the racial violence in the USA and other parts of world. Above all, there is a big question that connects with the human as a common species whose origin is so far found in Africa and around. The oldest fossils of modern human found in east Africa is between 350000 years old and 160000 years old.[170] The racial debate is so far questioned when we have same ancestor. Another question is the aspect of rigidity in a culture and denying the human sensibility, where a community kills its own people on the account of origin i. e. Khap panchayat who denies any marriage among the same Gotra and does barbaric and shameful[171] honour killing to protect it. One more question is addressing and accommodating the changing world, as the culture of Mithila-Maithil is global and inter-caste, inter-religion, inter-region, international marriages are very common and wide-spread among the youth.[172] New generation of Mithila is going through scientific explorations and they need valid argument to follow a tradition. Nevertheless, a system like Panji would help in finding the root if we consider the Indian girmitiya labourers taken to Africa, Caribbean countries, Europe and the USA by the British and who look for their roots. Similarly, besides those children of China who were killed[173], others who were sent for adoption in other countries during the period of 'One child Nation Policy' may have thrust to find their original families. These lost people try to find their roots, a natural human

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[170] *East Africa's Oldest Modern Human Fossil Is Way Older Than Previously Thought*. Accessed 17 April 2022. www.smithsonianmag.com

[171] Singh Vineet. 2015. *Khap Panchayats: Honor Killings in India*. Accessed 17 April 2022. www.researchgate.net

[172] Narayan, Abhishek Dev. 22 November 2020. *Genealogical Stratification in Mithila with Reference to Panji -Prabandha*. Webinar. IGNCA Ranchi. Accessed 20 February 2022. www.facebook.com/IGNCA/videos/696899794598336

[173] Wang, Nanfu and Zhang, Jialing. 2019. *One Child Nation* (Born in China). Documentary. California: Amazon Studio

tendency and emotional needs. Genealogical records may be very effective in this regard.

Choices and Contradictions

The discussion related to Panji system opens up further debates around available choices related to its practice and various contradictions the practitioners or believers may find. Four such inconsistencies are related to the 1) Bases of Panji system, 2) Range of Practice, 3) Propagated social structure and 4) Present Quest.

1) Bases of Panji system

The rationale behind keeping genealogical records like Panji system of Mithila relates with two bases including scientific basis of medical science as well as the socio-cultural synthesis of Purity of Lineage. The above-mentioned Bradford study and other different studies have demonstrated that consanguineous marriages are associated with higher health risks like autosomal recessive diseases and congenital malformations, mental retardation, higher pre-reproductive deaths, low birth weight and higher post-natal mortality among offspring.[174] Thus, the medical science has something to support the usefulness of genealogical records which is also supported by the traditional scientific exploration through trial-n-error method, as discussed previously. The modern genetics also provide advanced tools like DNA analysis and others for such needs. Nevertheless, what may be a

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[174] Islam, M. Mazharul. 2012. *Effects of Consanguineous Marriage on Reproductive Behaviour, Adverse Pregnancy Outcomes and Offspring Mortality in Oman*. Annals of Human Biology. Volume 40 (3), 2013. Accessed 17 April 2022. www.researchgate.net

scientific structure of these genealogical record is a matter of further extensive study. The contradiction lies where we see the consistent effort towards synthesis of purity of lineage and their impositions at any cost. The Panji system is conceptualised based on the lineage of 20 male sages and their offspring which also restrict the system to a particular community. Various socio-political changes seem to be the major argument in favour of preservation of lineage or purity including the migration from across the sub-continent and beyond, frequent foreign invasions (11th century onwards) and religious conflicts e.g. struggle between Brahman (Hindu) and Buddhist. The political advantage of 'divide and rule' taken by the kings or powerful at times, as discussed earlier, has been another major reason. That present a situation that in a multi ethnic/multi-cultural society, there has been a tendency to do a socio-cultural demarcation. The purity has become the criteria of that demarcation, criteria for one's identity or one's adherence to a perceived social value. The purity in marital relationship has had resulted in endogamy and other rigid and imposed norms in inter-community relationship.

2) Range of Practice

The level of practice of Panji system is also seen contradictory whether restricted or universal. It is limited to particular sections of society or communities - Brahman, Kayastha, Kshatriye and Vaishya. Brahman and Karn Kaystha have continued the practice whereas the latter two renounced long back. The other restriction is within the community, for example a different mode and type of keeping records for certain section/sections of Brahmans based on the idea of superiority or various manipulations by the king and authorities for certain benefits, as mentioned before. Practices like Bikauaa was one such manipulation

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by the privileged ones. The supporter of all the aspects of Panji system makes the argument that this system is restricted and there is no impact on other communities. They argue that Panji is meant for a few communities based on their choice and it has nothing to do with the entire society. However, that is discriminatory itself and somehow paradoxical. However, besides women being positioned secondary in this system, it has influenced entire society. A few communities synthesised and adopted the system but that becomes the criteria of entire social system. The complexity of system has further yielded the supremacy complex and hierarchy among every community or even at individual and family level. It is evident in the discrimination between the sub-caste of Brahmans like between Srotriye and Jaibaar, the lower category of Brahmans had to marry their daughters to Bikaua (the professional groom was paid dowry for this service) to elevate their social status. A number of women were exploited. They were married just for the purpose of a better genealogical status supposed to be elevated because of their few-day husbands as if the women had no share of genes in their offspring. Such synthetic hierarchy had many adverse effects on the community. The Mahapatra Brahmans, the section of Brahman who does the last rite and considered almost untouchable by other sections of Brahman, have had to pay a particular amount called 'Farak' (difference) to marry their children to upper non-Mahapatra Brahman. The privilege of having a Painjh, a title given after the name of a famous person in a family or a famous person got connected with a family largely through marital relationship, also discriminates between the individuals and families within the same section of the Brahman community. Similarly, Kayastha community is also divided as Pachhmaha, Dakhinaha, etc. The system made several categories, the trend which other non-practising communities also followed and made their own discriminatory sub-caste or class within caste. In a way, the entire society of

Mithila (and other parts of India) is divided by several imposed synthetic hierarchical norms, not to blame the adverse effect of Panji Prabandh only.

3) Propagated social structure

Another contradiction is the aspects of inclusion versus exclusion in terms of the social order the Panji system caused to establish. Considering the scientific basis of genealogy, it is inclusive as it supports the social and individual well-being and a proper genealogical record may help organise human relationships and thus facilitates a better social system. Nevertheless, it is highly exclusionary when adhering to the categories or certain high-born status. There have been several political motives behind such propagation, for example – "(In Manusmriti) Manu brands the Videhas, like the Licchavis, as Vratyas (impure caste). According to him; 'the offspring of a Vaishya father and Brahmana mother is a Videha, a native of Videha.[175] One can find the political motive behind establishing the privilege or supremacy based on hereditary. Such privilege or supremacy is nothing but based on unethical or invalid criteria.

4) Present Quest

The present context of Panji system brings forth two aspects of preserving it as a heritage or find the contemporariness. Human knowledge is developed, practiced, preserved and promoted as tradition. The tradition takes a new form derived from the old while responding to the changing world, truth of time as well as needs of

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[175] Thakur, Upendra. 1964. *Studies in Jainism and Buddhism in Mithila*. Pages 108-109

the hour. The tradition of knowledge and practices preserved as heritage has its own important value, learning from the past which was an accepted value at times and now definitely a source of learning or means of knowledge construction. The Panji system encompasses a wide range of topics of life – facets of history, culture, literature and so on. Looking for contemporariness in this debate certainly unfolds various aspects of life and present some contradictions. The concept of village as collective living and coexistence is expanding to become global, however have complicated structure. Migration seems to be an eternal phenomena and immigrants are rapidly harmonised with the locals. The inter-caste, inter-sect, inter-religion, inter-regional and inter-national marriages are common and widely accepted. The medical science describes the dangers of the consanguineous marriages so does the genealogy but what about the marriages outside one's clan or about the far-flung relationships. The general argument against inter-caste or inter-religion marriage is the protection of the gene pool of a homogeneous group. However, the variety of genes favour natural selection and longevity of a group. This may be one of the reasons why the close-knit group of Neanderthals disappear but the homo-sapiens flourished. There are other positive changes in modern human life like the modern solution of artificial insemination (IVF- In vitro fertilisation) which has brought happiness to the life of childless parents but these solutions widen the scope for human interaction and relationship breaking many conservative social norms. The people are exploring the world, moving to all directions, to the width and breadth of the world. They need more inclusive, progressive, scientific and relevant ideas, concepts and practices.

Conclusively, the scientific-logical solution of social issues is possible if the society has scope and it promotes the scientific thinking. It depends on the approach of the thinker and the doer. The Panji system and related social norms

and practices need to address the conflict between human values and social norms and reflect upon the victimisation of the females, the disadvantaged communities or certain exploited sections of communities. The tradition changes with time and adopt the new perspective, ideas and applications. The growing demand of the preservation of Panji can easily be done by the digital technology and made available for open access. That will help people find their roots especially the immigrants or other explorers. More dialogues and discourse are required around this cultural practice of Mithila. More study of the tradition and its relevance are needed. The compactness of the social fabric depends on the integrity of society that depends on how evenly or impartially the units of society are cohered. The more a society favours an egalitarian ethos in its construction and functioning system, the more it develops evenly and flourishes.

Chapter 8

Folk Wisdom - Dak Vachan

A common knowledge base that originates from the shared practices, beliefs, opinions or experience of Commons through a collective construction of knowledge and tested by a trail-n-error process is developed and internalised as a tradition of folk wisdom. The collective wisdom facilitates the ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding or common sense and insights discovered, observed, experimented, applied, lived by the generations of the Commons. Such tradition is found in almost every culture in all across India and the world, particularly among the agrarian societies, especially as most of these proverbs are found to be related to agrarian life, weather, rain, farming activities, etc. Some of these below-mentioned proverbs from different parts of the world talk about the entrepreneurial values, direct engagement in one's work and the ownership of work and the duty required for a farmer to succeed.

> ''I'll go myself', and 'I'll see to it', are two good servants on a farm. (Danish)

> He that by the plow would thrive, himself must either hold or drive. (Poor Richard)

> The lazy farmer dies with his head on the seed-grain. (Korean)

No one should speak of the harvest until he has planted the seed. (Unknown)[176]

If man works hard the land will not be lazy. (Chinese)''[177]

In rural Punjab, the values that are appreciated are those of the farmers who work themselves in their farms i. e. the ideology of Khudkasht (self-cultivation).

> ''Kheti Khasman seti, kheti sanyan seti.' - If the owner does not go to the field, he would be ruined. ''Jis kheti par Khasam na jawe, wuh kheti khasama nu khawe'' - The field to which the owner does not go, will eat up or ruin the owner. ''Kheti karo to hal joto, adhi karo to sath raho; Ghar bethe je poochhoge, to bail deke chhutoge'' - The best way of cultivation is to plough it yourself; if you have a tenant, watch him; enquiries made sitting at home will yield nothing; you may have to sell your bullocks to meet the expenses.''[178]

Similar sayings are found in Orissa and Bengal with the name of the author Khana, which says – Khotti khotti labho pai, taro ardhiko je niti dhain! Ghorai bosi kohe baat, taro ghare ha bhaat!![179] - One who works hard, earn full profit, one who is alert about his work done by others, earns half of the profit and one who sits at home instruct others only, s/he will starve.

[176] Stone, Jon R. (2006). *The Routledge Books of World Proverbs*. London and New York: Routledge. Pages 140-141, 204

[177] Arkush, R. David. *If Man Works Hard the Land Will not be Lazy: Entrepreneurial Values in North Chinese Peasant Proverbs*. Modern China. Vol. 10, No 4. Sage Publications, Inc. Pages 461-479

[178] Singh, Dr. Mahender. (2012). *Historical, Scientific and Contemporary Relevance of Agricultural Proverbs in the South-Eastern Punjab in Colonial India: An Empirical Study*. International Journal of Engineering Science & Humanities. Vo. 2 Issue 2. ISSN 2250-3552. Accessed 4 May 2022. www.academia.edu

[179] Nayak, Shyam Sundar. *Khana Bachana*. Accessed 4 May 2022. www.ova.gov.in

In Mithila, it says, ''Har Bahai ta apnahu bahi, nay bahi ta baislo rahi!'' - If you have to plough your field, do it your own, if you don't, at least accompany the plougher and supervise that! or ''Nittah kheti dosanjh gaai, je nay dekhe takre jaai!''[180] - Watch out your farm daily and your cow at least twice a day, one who does not do, loses. Many such wisdom related to the Commons' life are found across the culture and perhaps, exist since the early stages of human evolution. ''Proverbs are indeed bits of ancient wisdom that, as Max Müller had argued, bear 'the impress of the early days of mankind.' But their charm is not simply to be found in their being artefacts of an earlier day, or in their brevity and wit, but in the way they draw upon, and reflect, the common human experiences that are shared across time and space.''[181] Somehow, these commonalities among the varied cultures present the intellect and creativity of the Commons on the one hand and the development of a collective knowledge base tried and tested by the generations on the other. It also traces a common thread which connects societies in terms of knowledge sharing, the basis of such similarities may be the invention and spread of agriculture and related trade and subsequent mutual exchanges of thoughts, ideas and experience.

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[180] Jha, Dr. Shashinath. 2021. Ed. *Dak Vachan Samhita by Dak*. Darbhanga: K. S. Madhubani: Brahmi Prakashan.. Page 13
[181] Stone, Jon R. (2006). *The Routledge Books of World Proverbs*. Page xiii

Ploughing (Source- Bridgeman images)

In some regions of India, the proverbs are credited to different authors, most of them are disputed identities who scholars situate at different places. Dak in Mithila/Bengal, Ghagh in Uttar Pradesh, Tank and Bhaddar in Rajasthan, Dank in Bengal, Khana in Bengal/Orissa and others. Many proverbs in a particular region contain more than one names of the authors, like the names Dak, Ghagh and Bhaddar are found in many Maithili proverbs or Ghagh and Bhaddar in Hindi proverbs or Dak in Bengali. The proverbs are addressed to different characters at different places – Bhandair Rani in Mithila, Bhaduli in Magadh, Bhaddari at other regions[182] and so on. Dak addresses Bhandair at several places, for example, these below proverbs[183] describe the sign of the growth of a particular paddy crop in connection with the reflections in the growth of other plants and trees,

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[182] Jha, Dr. Shashinath. 2021. Ed. *Dak Vachan Samhita by Dak*. Page 14
[183] Jha, Dr. Shashinath. 2021. Ed. *Dak Vachan Samhita by Dak*. Page 63-64

Bad jn phulai ati bhakrar, javak baidhiyen dak ahankara!

Tenuk baidhiyen gamhairaik vridhi, kahaith dak sunu Bhandair siddhi!!

'If the banyan tree blooms greatly, the pride of javak (a variety of paddy) shoots up which means a great harvest! Says Dak, listen O great Bhandair, the more growth of Tenuk, the more growth of gamhair paddy!!'

Ingud ke jn fal atishay, san sn Bhandair ghar bhair ley!

Haithkarni jn adhik fulaay, ghorkarni ahina jn dekhay!

Kramsn haathi ghoda badhay, kudi-kudi 'Dak' tahi par chadhay!

Patal fulay ati fulwair, godhan badhat sunhu Bhandair!!

'If ingud (pitaujhia) bears plentiful fruits, Bhandair will have abundant San (Patua)! If Haithkarni (a variety of paddy) cultivates great and ghorkarni (another variety of paddy) is easily seen, the elephant (Haithkarni – haith means elephant) and horse (ghorkarni – ghor means horse) both grow well and Dak ride them happily! If the garden is full of the flowers of patal (parair), listen O Bhandair, your cattle will grow.' The depiction of this connected sign of growth in different natural phenomena seem to be based on the knowledge of different factors affecting the growth of plant and crop such as favourable weather or climatic condition. Nevertheless, such signs are treated as good omens as well, perhaps that is the way of approving a piece of knowledge in Commons' system of learning.

Paddy (Source- Exporters India)

These proverbs found in the form of oral tradition are compiled, edited and categorised in several episodes by the scholars. These episodes and sayings from different regions are largely similar, except the references of day-to-day life as well as the domains of knowledge. Further in this section, the proverbs including Dak Vachan of Mithila is discussed including the elaborations of some of the proverbs which depict the aspects of life metaphorically as well as other proverbs which talk about human and animal psychology. The collective nature of these proverbs as a shared folk wisdom is also deliberated.

Structure of the practice

Dak Vachan is found in different forms including one-liner, rhyming couplets or stanza in the languages of Maithili and its predecessors like Avhatt, that describe several walks of Commons' life and shared wisdom. The available compilations of these proverbs include Dakvachnamrita (Kapileshwar Jha, 1905), Maithil Dak (Jeevanand Thakur, 1950), Samagra Dak, Dak Vachan Sangrah (Raghuvansh Singh, 1955), Dak Vachan Samhita (Shashinath Jha, 1996 and 2001) and other studies like an analytical study of Dak - Dak Drishti (Mohan Bharadwaj, 2012)[184] or Behar Proverbs (John Christian, 1891)[185] which includes proverbs in various popular languages of North India including Bengali, Awadhi, Kannaujia, Maithili, etc and mentions the names of creators as Ghagh, Bhaddar or Dak. These three names are frequently used in Maithili proverbs interchangeably. These proverbs include different episodes of everyday life, rites and rituals, construction of houses, agricultural activities, rain, weather, family life, travel, unprecedented events, astrology (Varshphal), moral issues, etc. These proverbs talking about the pattern of life aligned with society and nature, and indicating their possible impact on Commons, are frequently quoted and still followed by many as references. Besides the modes of living, thoughts, intellectual and social status, surroundings, and other elements making up the social life, the aspects of history, sociology, ecology and philosophy are delineated, some of which are discussed further in this chapter. ''The processes and occasions of agrarian life and the folk calendar of peasantry's 'shared time'… How the weather forecasts, predictions of rain, folk perceptions of astronomy and other facets of environmental knowledge systems are interwoven inseparably with everyday peasant life in the world of Dāk vachan.'' It brings forth

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[184] Jha, Dr. Shashinath. 2021. Ed. *Dak Vachan Samhita by Dak*. Page 19
[185] Christian, John. 1891 (reprint 1986). *Behar Proverbs.* Delhi: Unity Book Service

the aspect of collective wisdom developed by the Commons or an ''alternative form of knowledge on the agrarian science. Other aspects of these proverbs are to decipher the cultural codes, social relationships and moral regimes that these sayings carry with them.'' Besides other important aspects of moral and psychological discourse through the metaphoric expression of life, the careful consideration of Dak ''possibly be an important source for the construction of the history of rain and weather in this part of the world''[186]. The below proverbs predict about the rain and guide the farmers accordingly,

> Shaain Raib Mangal ho Shivrait, hadhad pachhba bah din-rait!
>
> Nadiyaak teere-teere kariah chaas, takrahun rakhiyah thodbe aas!!
>
> Pachhba bahike barisai sheet, unch joit pia sutahu nicheet!
>
> Pahil pawan purab sauna abai, barisai megh ati jhadi lagabai!
>
> Chamke pachchhim utra or, taun Janiah varsha ho jor!
>
> Pashchim dis jaun hariar meh, chamke bijuli vayuk neh!
>
> Varsha hoi musal dhaar, saat din dhair 'Dak' goar!![187]

'If the festival of Shivrait[188] falls on a Saturday, Sunday or Tuesday and if the western wind blows in a full swing, keep the farming activities close to the river but do not expect much from that as well. If after the western wind you see the morning dews, then plough even the high lands and be relaxed. If the first wind

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[186] Jha. Sadan. 2014. *Dāk Vachan: Proverbial Wisdom from Mithila, Bihar*. Page 58

[187] Jha, Dr. Shashinath. 2021. Ed. *Dak Vachan Samhita by Dak*. Page 46

[188] *Shivrait* (Mahashivratri) Festival to worship lord Shiva, usually celebrated in the month of February or March.

comes from the east, there will be pouring of rain. If it is Utra Nachhattra and the you see the lightning in the west, be assured there will be a heavy rain. If there is dark blackish-green cloud in the west and the lightning reinforced by the wind gets harder, there will be continuous raining for seven days', says Dak. This poetic prediction of the rain has some interesting expression, such as 'chamke bijuli vayuk neh' – the force of the lightning enriched by the wind is illustrated as the force of 'Neh' (love) between the two.

Utra is one of the twenty-seven Nachhattras or lunar mansions or asterisms into which the traditional north Indian agrarian calendar is divided. (Utra Nakchhattra falls on the month of September). There are 27 nachhattra/nakhat/nachhattr/nichhattr/nakshatra or lunar asterisms in each year, and consequently two and a quarter in each month. Each asterism though, is not of equal length and the longest is hathiya, with sixteen lunar days. Every agricultural operation commences in a certain asterism.[189] When the farmers are all set to sow the paddy saplings and waiting for the rain, the proverb guides as, 'Dine badra, raati nivaddar, bah purvaiya habbar-habbar! Kahai dak biya mat khoah, dhaanak khet me rahair boah!! - 'If you see clouds in day time but the sky is clear at night and there is fast blowing eastern wind', Dak warns (that there would not be any rain) and says, 'do not take the (rice) saplings out for planting, instead sow the rahair (tuar lentis) in your paddy farm.' Rahair needs less water to grow but paddy does. The prediction suggests that there will be no rain for a longer period.

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[189] Grierson, George Abraham. 1885 (Reprint 1975). *Bihar Peasant Life Being A discursive catalogue of the Surroundings of the People of That Province*. Delhi: Cosmo Publications. Pages 271–73
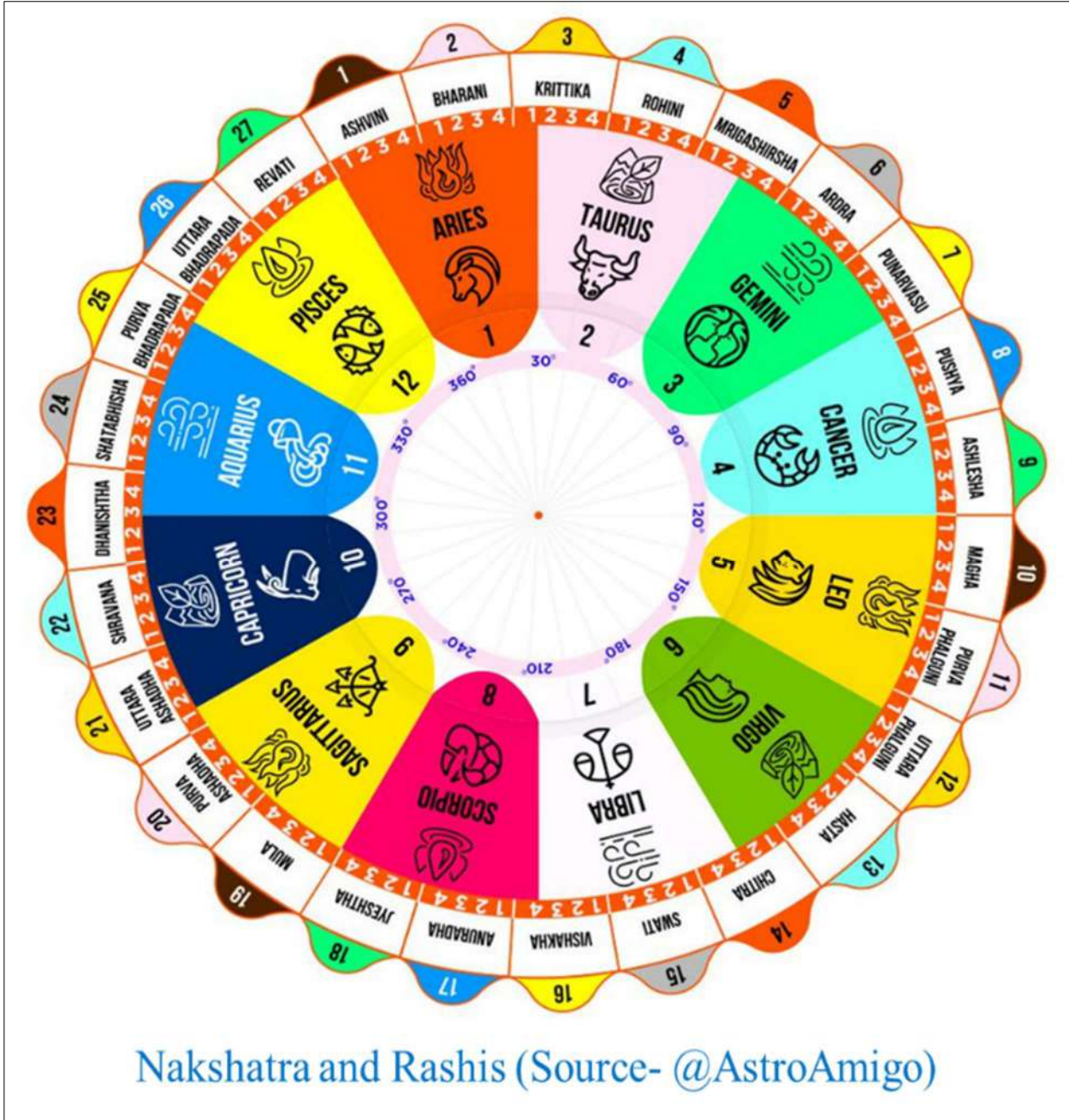
Nakshatra and Rashis (Source- @AstroAmigo)

In another proverb on the social relationship as reflected in the human/animal psychology, 'Babhan Kutta Haaith, teenu jaatahin khaaith! Kayath Kauaa rod, teenu jaait bator!' - Brahman, dogs and elephants damage their own castes whereas Kayasth, crow and rod handhold and support their castes. It describes the traits of the castes as well as the psychology or social behaviour of human group or certain instincts of animal species. While criticizing the affluent caste of Brahman being destructive to their own group, the saying recognizes the quality of cohesiveness among the Kayasth community. Though these perceptions about communities might seem generalized, it may be evident in the case of animals. The dogs are too possessive about their territory but one can see the unity of crows when any one of them is in trouble.

The metaphoric expressions are widely found in these proverbs, the below one depicts the different postures of a person while sleeping –

Pahil pahar raait takuaataan, dosar pahar raait dhanushabaan,

Tesar pahar raait kankoDak taang, charim pahar raait motri baanh!!

'In the first part of the night, one sleeps in a straight posture like a takua (a thick iron niddle), in second part in a posture like a bow and arrow ready to fire, in the third, like a crab's leg and like a bale/bundle in the fourth part of the night.' These proverbs can be studied through different standpoints, approaches or the aspects of meaning-making. The main essence of this collective system of knowledge lies in the social as well as human-nature co-existence. The nature, the natural phenomena and their effect on the human as well as intricacies of the human relationship are defined through using the attributes of natural objects. That somehow presents an epistemic tool based on the source/object of knowledge derived from nature, as

also explored as the 'language of nature' in the previous chapters on musical expression and visual expression. The nature has a self-governed system, an automated arrangement or a self-instructed process through which a natural phenomenon occurs. Animal species including the human make the meaning of the particular phenomenon according to their perception or the cognitive abilities or especially for the human, also according to the mode of judgement whether epistemic, ethical or aesthetic. The knowledge related to human-social-natural life as interpreted in these proverbs are largely constructed based on the human experience of nature and social life as well as the means of knowledge derived from the self-governed system of nature. The means of knowledge include the metaphoric expression, comparability as well as decoding the process and outcome of those natural phenomena which cause or inspire the human acts.

Nature of the proverbs

These proverbs serve not only as figure of speech which add a special flavour to the language, but are also the poetic representation of knowledge full of humour, satire and wit. They are profound, experiential and sometime very direct which often sound ridiculous. The meanings of these proverbs are mostly multi-dimensional i. e. more than one meaning. Quoted as a rustic wisdom in Behar proverbs,[190] which says, if a ''rustic wishes to express his/(her) sense of the unfitness of things, the unseasonableness of a remark, or the inappropriateness of an act, (s)/he puts into requisition the implements of agriculture with which (s)/he is familiar, and conveys his/(her) sense of incongruity by the proverb: Hansua ke biyah khurpa ke git..In the wedding of the sickle, the song of the hoe!'' or An

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[190] Christian, John. 1891 (reprint 1986). *Behar Proverbs.* Pages xv

expression for a superficial, overambitious or impractical situation goes like this, 'Pain me machhri aa nau-nau kutiya bakhra' – The fish is still in the water and the division of its share among the fishers has already been done. To expose an opportunist or someone who takes advantage over others, 'Ka dha elain Heera aa maar paselain Jeera' – Heera makes all the efforts to arrange and cook the rice but Jeera just pours the water from the rice and takes all the credit. For the long-term consequences of a small incident, it says – 'Choir bhel takar nai dar, jam parik gel takar dar' - It is not the fear of the theft, but the tendency of the thief. ''Proverbs, however quaintly expressed, contain the essence of some moral truth or practical lesson; they are drawn from real life, and are generally the fruit of philosophy grafted on the stem of experience…they are the safe index of people's life…help us to see the people as they are…not only epigrams and pithy utterances containing practical truths, wholesome rebukes or salutary advice, but also nursery rhymes, proverbial figures of speech, short fables and lampoons…they walk upon men's tongues, dance in their fancies, are carried about in their memories and are reserved for graces of their discourses, when they desire to appear in their festivals habits and holiday behaviour…(these proverbs) may be classified under two broad heads, those of a practical or worldly nature, and those of a moral and didactic nature.[191] Some of these below proverbs, though rustic and satirical in nature, present a mix of practical life and morality, guiding towards the ethical issues[192] through worldly affairs.

Godkath khat, ubtan ghod, naair kulachchhain, chakar chor!

Ehi charuken turit parihari, (nay ta) tumma baaihn fakiri kari!!

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[191] Christian, John. 1891 (reprint 1986). *Behar Proverbs*. Pages viii - xvii
[192] Kamal, Kashyap. *Analysis of Dak Vachan*. Audio. Accessed 14 May 2022. www.youtube.com/channel/UCq5iWGHncVPLw8AG8wRjIKw

'Uneven legs of a cot, very thin/ watery lentil-paste, wife of a bad character and a thieving servant, leave these four immediately or else you end up being a vagabond.' The proverb points out the situations humorously, these four things/persons do not serve the purpose, but make the situation worst. The uneven legs of a cot cause disturbed sleep, a watery lentil-paste do not serve the purpose of healing a wound, a wife of a bad character cannot love honestly and a thieving servant robs his/her master.

Kapti mitr, kosaliya maay, budibak beta, teta jamaay!

Kahaith Dak charu parihari, budibak san sasuro naih kari!!

'Deceptive friend, selfish mother, spoiled son and bitter-tongued son-in-law, leave these four, says 'Dak' and 'do not have even a foolish father-in-law'.' A deceptive friend is an enemy in disguise acts a sympathizer and finds out all the weakness, who can harm even more than an enemy. A selfish mother may ruin the life of her son, especially a married son. She being very possessive may not give her son a proper space to manage his own life or interrupt his relationship with his wife. A spoiled son can ruin a family and loses all the money, no matter how rich the family is. A bitter-tongued son-in-law may disregard his wife's family or even disconnect her from them. Dak says even a foolish father-in-law who a man does not need to live with can create problem in his marital relationship or may become unnecessary burden.

Kanchi kuchi veshya ghaalay, baabhan ghalay daasi!

Hansi thatha sanyasi ghalay, chorahin ghalay kaasi!!

'A prostitute is destroyed if she remains filthy, so is a Brahman if he keeps a mistress. A hermit is ruined if get involved in delectation and so is a thief in Kashi (a holy place where people go for self-purification)'. Here, the behaviour and attitude of persons in certain professions/roles are scrutinized. The prostitute is supposed to look attractive or a Brahman needs to live a life of purity and detachment. A hermit if involved in delectation cannot remain virtuous and righteous. Similarly, a thief is no longer a thief if s/he takes the path of piousness. The proverb somehow points out the necessity of a profession.

Some of these proverbs guide about the food as prescribed or prohibited in a particular month.[193] The food prescribed according to the particular month includes-

> Saon khatta, bhadav teet, aasin men gud bhakshan meet!
>
> Katik muli aghan tel, Pus dudh saun kariyah mel!
>
> Magh maas uthi praat nahay, fagun me ghee khichdi khay!
>
> Chait chibabay nimak paat, maas baishakh baasi bhat!

'Sour food in August, bitter in September, eating jaggery in October, radish in November, oil in December, more milk in January, taking early morning bath (exception- not a food but daily chore) in February, eating ghee-khichdi in March, chewing Neem leaves in April and eating stale rice in May'. The food prohibited according to the month includes –

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[193] Jha, Dr. Shashinath. 2021. Ed. *Dak Vachan Samhita by Dak*. Page 86

Saon saag, na bhadav dahi! Aasin karela kaatik mahi!!

Aghan jeera, puse dhana! Maghe misri, fagun chana!!

Chait gud, baishakhak tel! Jethak panth, ashadak bel!!

Niyamit vidhi je sanyam karay! Ta ghar vaida paaon na dharay!!

'Leafy vegetables in August, yogurt in September, bitter gourd in October, buttermilk in November, cumin in December, coriander in January, sugar-candy in February, gram in March, jaggery in April, oil in May, sunlight in June and wood apple in July, if one practices abstinence regularly, s/he never needs a doctor's treatment'. These prescriptive pieces of knowledge seem to be situated at certain geographical area that may/may not be applied to other regions. For example, in the rainy season (the months of Saon and Bhado), there are various harmful bacteria and other disease-causing microorganisms found in the humid region like in Mithila. The food is spoilt very soon and cold food like yogurt or green leafy vegetables like saag are prone to the infection.

More or less in these proverbs, women are particularly discussed on a high ethical ground, they are expected to follow several moral norms. To ridicule a woman who challenges the rules or disagrees with what is expected from her, it says 'Rahair sabse bahair' – Rahar (Tur- lentis) is beyond any control. It grows on the periphery (weir) of the piece of a farm land or on a high land as more water in the land harms it. Similarly, 'Tedhka siso' – crooked Shisham tree, is a disrespectful term for an unusually tall and dark women who usually in shame, stand/walk with her head down and a bent posture. 'Nata badad, bahuriya joi, ne ghar basai, ne kheti hoi!' - The dwarf ox and minor wife are not useful at all. The wife does not stay but elope, and the dwarf ox cannot manage the ploughing.

Arhar (Source- Apni Kheti & shutterstock.com)

''The interplay of feminine identities and rain opens up another possibility, another line of inquiry and we get, Titar pankhi badri, ranr (rand) phulel lagay, Kah bhaddar sun bhaddari wah awe yah jay - 'When you see a cloud speckled like the wings of the partridge, and a widow applying scented oil to her hair', said Bhaddar, 'Hear, O Bhaddari, the former will bring rain and the latter will elope'. One more version ''goes by the name of Dak which says, 'Titar pakh megha ure, o bidhwa musukae! Kahe Dak sunu Dākini, u barse ee jae!! - 'when the clouds fly like the wings of the partridge and when a widow smiles', saith Dāk, 'hear, O' Dākini, the one is going to rain and the other to marry'. 'Titar pankhi': spotted or speckled like the wing of a partridge. A Rānr (widow) is never supposed to apply scented oil or

adorn herself in any way. This interchange of names (Dāk for Bhaddari) in these two abovementioned couplets, further suggests that two have often been treated as one person.''[194] Similar to this, a Maithili couplet says – ''Teetar Pankhi Badra, Vidhwa kajal rekh! E barsay o udhray, ahi men meen ne mesh!! - if a cloud speckled like the wings of the partridge, and a widow applying kajal (eyewash) to her eyes, this is useless to doubt that both of them will cross the limit. The former will pour heavily and the latter will elope. Here 'meen ne mesh' is a saying means 'useless to doubt', this saying is a term comes from astrology.''[195] The references like the names of the creators, 'applying Kajal' or 'scented oil' in the three versions of the same proverb, suggests that the proverb is adopted, contextualized and modified in a certain manner, like the expression 'kajal rekh' a bit more sophisticated than 'ranr (rand) phulel lagay' or 'bidhwa musukae' as well as the term 'meen ne mesh' taken from astronomy. These compilations of proverbs show a progression of language from Avhatt to Maithili on one hand and from old Maithili to the new and the addition of Sanskrit (the ancient language of scholars) or Hindi (the recently developed language) words, on the other. The compilers seem to edit and revise according to their understanding and the context as discussed further in this chapter.

In another case mentioned in Behar proverbs (1891), ''Bhaddar says, 'Awat adar na diye, jat na diye hast! Kahen bhaddar dou gaye, banita au girhast!!' This saying has a double entendre: it may mean the 'wife' or the rainy season. On coming home ('to her father-in- law's house'), if the wife is not received with due ceremony and regard; and if ongoing (leaving) the house she is not given any present in her hand (the usual etiquette of domestic life), says Bhaddar, she will go

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[194] Jha. Sadan. 2014. *Dāk Vachan: Proverbial Wisdom from Mithila, Bihar*. Page 42
[195] Jha, Dr. Shashinath. 2021. Ed. *Dak Vachan Samhita by Dak*. Page 17

(away), i. e. she will elope. Or, 'if at the commencement of the monsoons there is no rain in Adra Nachhattra/Nakshatra, and if, at their close, there is none in Hathiya Nakshatra, then says Bhaddar, it is a bad look out for the farmer as well as the labourer (i.e., the farmer is sure to be ruined and the labourers are sure to get no work and will starve).''[196] ''Adar, a colloquial form of Adra, or Ardara Nachhattra/Nakshatra also means 'civility'—to treat one with due civility and ceremony (adar karna), and hast is 'hand' or the Hathiya Nachhattra…The former (Adra Nachhattra) embraces parts of June and July; and the latter (Hathiya) parts of September and October. They mark the beginning and end of the rainy seasons; and are principal periods of rain, on which chiefly depends the success of agricultural operations.''[197] A similar proverb in Dak Vachan Samhita (2021), Dak says, 'Abat nahi adar diye, jaat ne dijje hast! Yahi dono tab hi gaye, pandit au grihastha!!'[198] Beside the different names of creators, the only difference between these two versions is the word pandit (priest) which is used in latter instead of the word banita (wife) used in former. Therefore, the meaning has changed, that pandit needs to be welcomed properly and should be given gifts/money when he leaves. One can see it as a deliberate effort to establish the importance of a priest and giving him an advantageous position.

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[196] Christian, John. 1891 (reprint 1986). *Behar Proverbs.* Pages 206-207
[197] Grierson, George Abraham. 1885 (Reprint 1975). *Bihar Peasant Life Being A discursive catalogue of the Surroundings of the People of That Province*. Pages 271–73
[198] Jha, Dr. Shashinath. 2021. Ed. *Dak Vachan Samhita by Dak*. Page 17

Metaphoric Expression

Largely, the composition of these proverbs is illustrative with the use of concrete and experiential instances/examples of life. Abstractness is not found as a sole feature in the representations, although they may be the subject of different interpretation. With time, some cultural references have been changed i. e. some activities/objects are no longer in use or are modified. Even Maithili have evolved over time, new expressions have been added. These changes are evident in many of these proverbs. The metaphoric expressions are an integral feature throughout these proverbs. These metaphors work at different levels, the proverbs have at least one direct meaning which is derived from the practical life generally understood by everybody. One can derive different other meanings of various philosophical nature. Some of the below proverbs mentioned in Dak Vachan Samhita[199] discuss different good/bad omens[200] or certain moral or social learning as reflected through the psychology of animals. The following proverb is Vairi-mitra Kathan (Enemy-friend saying)

> Pakshiraj kesar saun sang, saap shwaanken dobar rang!
>
> Gaje majaare ho utpatti, meshe musaih bahu sampatti!
>
> Pakshi naag karat samhaar, vanbilaar musaa ken maar!!

It talks about the types of relationships between friends and enemies, 'With the eagle and the lion respectively, the snake and dog cannot have any relationship other than that they are preys of their eternal enemies! During the Hathiya (Gaje)

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[199] Jha, Dr. Shashinath. 2021. Ed. *Dak Vachan Samhita by Dak*. Pages 26, 31, 55, 58-59, 60 and 62- 63
[200] Kamal, Kashyap. *Analysis of Dak Vachan*. Audio. Accessed 14 May 2022

Nakchhatra when there is abundant rice harvest, the rats are rich and thus the cats flourish and multiply' as they have plentiful preys to eat.

The below example describes the behaviour of an ox in connection with the farming activities, it says,

> Barda mute khet dahaay, khaisai khet jaun barad paraay!
>
> Gora jhaar ki mura jhaar, taun ne neek jaun khase faar!
>
> …Khur sing saun mati liye, bahut such ki manahi diye!!

'If the ox urinates in the field, it will be a heavy rain. If it is taken to the field and it flees abruptly, there will not be any crop in the field. If during preparing the soil, the colter falls, it will not be good…if the ox digs the soil with his horn and hoof, one can be sure that will be a great time.' Here, one can find the projection of superstitious beliefs. Nevertheless, the connection of ox with the land described in this proverb seems to be important for the success of the farming. The willingness of the ox and its instinct matter for the said farming activities. In the below example - the features of crows viz-e-viz the attributes of human/caste are described -

> Tanu ati kaari badka lol, paigh kaak ati unche bol!
>
> Tahi kaak ke babhan jaan, kahaith 'Dak' je aan nai maan!
>
> Pingal aankhi neel rang thor, sab deh kaari kshatri sor!
>
> Pandu neel rang chonch o deh, kahaith 'Dak' je Vaishya kahi leh!!

'A deep dark complexioned big crow with a big beak and an excessive loud voice, consider it as a Brahman, says 'Dak'. A dark-complexioned crow with brown crooked eyes and a blue beak is a Kshatriya. Dak says that the crow with yellowish-blue complexion and beak is Vaishya.' Certain traits of the crow are attributed to the human or the caste. It is difficult to generalized such things, however the loud voice or crooked eyes of the crows may fetch certain favourable situations and so do the humans.

EASTERN JUNGLE CROW (CORVUS LEVAILLANTII)   WESTERN JACKDAW (COLOEUS MONEDULA)   CARRION CROW (CORVUS CORONE)   PIED CROW (CORVUS ALBUS)   COMMON RAVEN (CORVUS CORAX)

INDIAN JUNGLE CROW (CORVUS CULMINATUS)   HOODED CROW (CORVUS CORNIX)   ROOK CROW (CORVUS FRUGILEGUS)   LARGE-BILLED CROW (CORVUS MACRORHYNCHOS)   HOUSE CROW (CORVUS SPLENDENS)

Species of crow in India (Source- AKHILCHANDRIKA)

Similarly, the following proverb discusses the chaos in society or human downfall through certain behaviour or instincts of the animals.

Kukur bilair jaun van jay, vanak harina gaam dekhay!

Gagnahi geedh ghumi ken aabi, bhavan bhiti baisai sukh paabi!!

…Kauaak beechme kukur baaj, raati din jaun iah samaj!

Kahaith 'Dak' sunu 'Bhandair Rani', ohi desh me bhay ati maani!!

'If the dogs and cats start leaving for the forest, the wild dear is seen in the village, the vultures from the sky comes again and again and find solace sitting on the house…the dog speaks together with crows, if such things happen in the society all the time, says Dak to Bhandair Rani, be cautious in that country.' The dogs and cats are one of the most faithful companions, if they leave the human habitat and go to the wild, it means the relationship is destroyed. If the wild dear is seen in the village or the vulture sitting in the courtyard of houses is happy that means the wildness or inhumaneness prevails. The dog speaking together with the crows may refer to the growth of a deceiving opportunistic attitude in a faithful companion. Here, certain human attributes are discussed which if lost may ruined one's personal and social life.

Harinak Gawahi Suggar Del, Dunu paraa kay van chal gel!

Dairak chukkal vaanar gel, avsar chukkal maanav gel!!

'The dear testifies the boar, and both of them run away to the jungle. The monkey loses if it misses the branch, so does a person if misses an opportunity.' The dear is blamed as culprit for destroying the paddy crop. The boar who is actually the

bigger partner of the crime believed to be an innocent and asked to be a witness. The boar grabs this opportunity and saves its partner. Both of them are set free. Opportunity does not come often, one needs to identify and use, or else will regret.

> Dahin payer san shwaan yadi, ang nimn kuriabai!
>
> Udar math aru kanth gud, sukhad rajya dhan paabai!
>
> …Shwaan karai krandan Jahan, lotai bhumi par jay!
>
> 'Dak' kahaith nishchay tahan, aabai bipdaa dhay!!

Describing a dog's behaviour and action, the proverb says, 'if a dog itches these parts of its body with its right leg, the belly, head, neck, or hip, it means one will get the fortune…if the dog cries and rolls on the ground, it will certainly be a huge crisis, says Dak.' Generally, people believe that pets have some instinctive responses which are the signs of anticipations. Here, these actions of the dog connected with the state of mind also shows how it is treated. The first part shows that the dog is contented with the treatment which means the people are happy as well. In the second part of the proverb, the dog throws itself on the ground, cries and mourns badly, it shows that people are not in a better state of mind and there may be a disaster on the way.

Furthermore, some of the proverbs connect different types of plants with other facets of life or the effects of certain plant over the others. The following example discusses the attributes or growth of certain plant and their association with life. 'Baans man kusiaar fulay, chhao maas me ghar bilai! Hati ke banah apan ghar, kahay 'Dak' rau shanti kar!! - 'Bamboo, Mayna (tree with big leaves) or sugarcane if grow in your backyard, your house will disappear in six months, Dak suggests to build the house away from them.' Such plants and trees spread very fast, grab the land as well as hamper the foundation of the house. This proverb states the sign of good paddy crop connected with the growth of other plants and trees. 'Atishay sakhuak gaach fulay, kalam-shalik vriddhi dekhay! Adhik fulai jan laal ashok, rakat dhaan ati 'Dak' bhulok!!' – The high blossom of sakhua plant denotes the growth of kalam paddy. The rich blooming red ashok tree denotes the big growth of rakat (ramdulari) paddy in the field, says Dak.' It describes the sign of the growth of these paddy crops in the reflections of the growth of other plants and trees. As stated earlier, such connections between different natural phenomena depict the understanding of influencing factors leading the growth of plant and crop such as favourable weather or climatic condition. For example – the Sakhua (the steadiest wood in the region used as a beam carry the weight of the roof and upper floors) tree and kalam variety of paddy may have similar requirement of weather and climate condition as well as other inputs in their farming or plantation. It may also beneficial in understanding the climatic seasonality by utilizing weather indicators based on the phenologies[201] of local vegetation.

In many of those proverbs like the above-mentioned ones, the metaphors are encoded with different meanings, the actions of animals are coincided with the

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[201] Phenology - The science of the relations between climate and periodic biological phenomena, as the migrations and breeding of birds, the flowering and fruiting of plants, etc.

humans, certain traits of human are depicted and discussed in terms of animals' behaviour, the connections between plants as well as the psychological aspects of animals and humans are discussed with a broad view of personal and social life. That somehow fortify the inter-relation between the living-beings which further leads to a broad framework of life rooted in and inspired from the self-governed and self-sustained system of the nature.

Sakhua flower (source: 123rf.com) and Bamboo (Down to Earth)

Perspective on the Practice

As mentioned earlier about the ownership of this collective knowledge base which is an ongoing debate. Some of the scholars argue for the collective nature of the proverbs and thus brings forth the collective ownership of the Commons, as quoted and discussed previously and argued as well. The other wing of scholars projects the creators as persons like Dak, Ghagh, Tank, Baddar, Khana etc. Almost all of them are identified as males except Khana who is referred to as a female. Interestingly, most of them are claimed to be related to the mathematician-astrologer-astronomer Varahmihir (505 CE-587 CE), the author of Pancha-Siddhantika (Five Treatises).[202] The popular anecdotal references found in these regions conclude, Dak, Ghagh, Tank, Bhaddar as the son of Varahamihira (Brahman caste) from different mothers, most of these women are said to be from agrarian communities who are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, with perhaps one exception of Khana referred to as the wife of Varahamihira[203]. Those anecdotes also mention that Varahmihir had predicted that if a child was born on a particular auspicious moment (muhurt), he would become a great scholar. It sounds very strange that Varahmihir was present simultaneously at several places on that same auspicious moment, had a determined pre-planned sexual relation with different non-Brahman lower caste women (from Ahir/Gop/Goar community) and all of these children born were sons. In some of the story, when the child grows older, he refuses to go along with his father and stays with his mother.[204] The story associated with Khana as wife of Mihir (or Varahmihir) is quite different whose intellect surpassed her husband's. She became more famous and thus, for the sake

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[202] *Varahamihira: Indian Philosopher and Scientist*. Accessed 4 May 2022. www.britannica.com
[203] Suresh, Shri. Ed. *Brihat Khanara Vachana and Kaka Charitra.* Accessed 4 May 2022. www.archive.org. Page 3
[204] Jha, Dr. Shashinath. 2021. Ed. *Dak Vachan Samhita by Dak*. Page 14

of her husband's position in the king's court, she had to cut her tongue and commit suicide.[205] These anecdotal records or popular stories do not seem to have any valid argument, they are popular, repeatedly told and heard by the people, and thus believed to be true. Most of them though humorous for many, may be unfair to the ones targeted. One such story is about the famous philosopher of ancient Mithila, Udyanacharya who once had an academic contest with a Buddhist scholar who refuted his philosophical theory. He challenged the Buddhist. The story goes on with the final ordeal when Udyanacharya framed a condition for the winner that whoever jump from a palm tree and still remain alive would be the winner.[206] Both of them tried and the Buddhist died. This story is quite popular and people enjoy the humour. However, just to ridicule the Buddhist, the story reduces a scholar like Udyanacharya quite strangely. How interesting it would be if all the intellectual debates are framed in such a manner, the participants of a seminar climb the tree and jump off. These absorbing anecdotal references are more or less unjust to the person/s whether Dak's mother or Udyanacharya. These narratives seem to be following the widespread tendency of iconifying things which are social and collective in nature. Adding an icon to a collective work based on the popular pattern of ownership and hierarchy, here it connects with a Brahman astrologer-scholar Varahmihir, a representative of intelligentsia. Interestingly, there is no proverb found where the author has mentioned the name of Varahmihir or any such scholars. The name of these creators come frequently along with their castes which is mostly the agrarian castes. Most of these proverbs are related to the aspects of deep-rooted agrarian life. It is somehow the astrology, that leaves the space for claiming the Brahman identity of these creators with a pre-notion that a Brahman

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[205] Suresh, Shri. Ed. *Brihat Khanara Vachana and Kaka Charitra.* Page 3
[206] Bhattacharya, Dineshchandra. 1958. *History of Navya-Nyaya in Mithila*. Chapter 1, Page 6

man can only be an astrologer. This argument may not be enough as there are several non-Brahman men, women or even non-Hindus practice the astrology. Also, as exemplified and argued earlier that these proverbs have developed in a long period of time, cannot be the experience of just any particular person but the community or across the humanity, and articulated by many people, some of them by the poets, seers, scholars and many of them by the Commons. Some of those names are found in the proverbs but that does not make them owner of the entire repertoire. Even they may have also built their works based on the collectives. The deliberate effort to attribute such collective knowledge to certain person can be seen as knowledge politics i. e. projecting the supremacy of particular person, caste, region and so on. A discussion on this effort of establishing the creation/creator of folk wisdom in the periphery of intelligentsia has also been done further with reference to Dak.

The historical and social construction of Dak

Scholars from Mithila have claimed that the historical genealogy of these sayings goes back to the fourteenth to the fifteenth century AD or earlier. The references of Dak vachan is found in 1400 CE work 'Vyavharratnavli' by Pashupati, 1450 CE work 'Vyavharpradeep' by Harpati and others. Dak is said to be from the Dakhi village near Laukhi of Madhubani district (Mithila/Bihar). The word 'Dak' means divine man, originates from the Sanskrit word 'Daksh' which further localized as Daksh = Dakk = Dak, a related word 'Dakin' denotes a mystic woman. Other related terms like 'Dakab' means boasting or crow speaking loudly or Dak means

post while Dakiya means one who delivers the post.[207] Haat Dak is a term in Mithila used for the laments of women who cry when the males come back home after cremation. They cry because Dak causes their dear ones becoming a pitar (spirit). Dak in Sanskrit is a ghost since it eats the share of the dead.[208] Dak in his proverbs calls himself as 'Goar' which is the name of a farmer's community located in Mithila. Reflecting on the two broad claims – First, that Dak is a male poet from Mithila and he belonged to an agrarian lower caste of Goar; and second, referring to some of the anecdotal references which point out him as the son of a Goar mother and a Brahman father i.e., Varahmihir.

Dak as a male is obviously conceived and believed, perhaps because of the name 'Dak' that is masculine, Dakini is its feminine form. ''We find Maithil scholars looking for traces of Dak vachan at the margins of old Sanskrit texts predominantly as allegories of their own Brahmanic concerns... The narrative of Dak's birth from the sexual intercourse between a Sanskrit scholar–astrologer father and a lower caste mother is like meeting the precondition for Sawhney's argument of 'responding to the passion of the Sanskrit texts'[209] where she has argued that the phrase 'responding to the passion' of the Sanskrit texts implies an upper caste man finding a sanction in these texts or even an invitation for sleeping with a lower caste woman. What is equally revealing in the construction of Dak's Maithil identity is the passion for history. However, the point of convergence between both the passions is that none of the Maithil scholars kept open the possibility of Dak as

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[207] Jha, Dr. Shashinath. 2021. Ed. *Dak Vachan Samhita by Dak*. Pages 9-11
[208] Malangia, Mahendra. *Mithilaak Amurt Sanskriti – Dak Vachan*. Dharohar Shrinkhla-1 seminar on 16 July 2018. Achhinjal. Accessed 4 May 2022. www.youtube.com/channel/UCKXxEM_9I8Cw3QrfCmXoJ8w
[209] Sawhney. Simona. 2009. *The Modernity of Sanskrit*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black. Page 2

born of a low caste mother without a Brahman father.''[210] Adding to the previous argument about the shortcoming of the popular stories, there is a widespread belief about the importance of the lineage of a person. Believing Dak cannot be the son of a lower caste father and projecting him as having the lineage of a Brahman scholar father somehow coincide with another social incident. Referring to the previous chapter on the genealogical records of 'Panji', many people for the sake of getting their family registered in Panji had their daughters married to a person from high caste. Each one of them having high born status known to as 'Bikaua' (ready to be sold) used to marry several women for money whose offspring would be considered as part of the lineage of that person. Thus, a scholar like Dak is son of a father from a lower community is beyond the imagination of many. Several of them used to end up being widows when a Bikaua died. The plight of those women married to Bikaua is mostly ignored and untold.

In Maithili proverbs, all three names Dak, Ghagh and Bhaddar are found to be the creators. Many scholars from Mithila claim these three as one person belonged to Mithila whereas scholars from different region have their own claims. ''The book by Ram Naresh Tripathi is perhaps the most comprehensive collection of these sayings published so far in Hindi. Written in 1931 with the wider objective of controlling the declining (the word used is samuhik patan literally meaning collective decline) moral–agrarian order (presupposing a golden past bestowed with prosperity in the agriculture production in the country since the Vedic period), Tripathi lists a range of indicators for the fall… Ram Naresh Tripathi's compilation is significant as later Maithili compilers crucially engaged with Tripathi's formulations and invested heavily in refuting Tripathi's claim of Ghagh as a non-Maithil, a resident of Sarai Ghagh in the proximity of the city of Kannauj,

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[210] Jha. Sadan. 2014. *Dāk Vachan: Proverbial Wisdom from Mithila, Bihar*. Page 58

Uttar Pradesh.[211] In other narratives, Dak is considered as a Buddhist, ''In this region, the word Dak is being used to convey 'influence' and capability and not for calling someone (phalan babu ke dak chalai chhanhi). Similarly, the word Dakini connotes a woman who is a dayan (witch) and who is skilled in performing tantra-mantra, jadu-tona, etc. In the age of Buddha, whosoever (male) after becoming siddha (expert) composed two-three, ten–twenty stanzas became known as Dak. In case of a woman, she was known as Dakini.[212] ''The Maithil scholar, Govind Jha says that people know who he was and they consider him as a jewel among themselves. This is why we call him lok ratna (a gem of the folk). He establishes the identity of Dak as closer to the people and the day-to-day life of the society, differentiates between 'Pundit Ratna' (a gem of a scholar) and lok ratna and says that while the former has some distance with everydayness and they live in their own cocoon, Dak had all the qualifications for being a pundit yet he never chose to disassociate himself from social and popular life. Govind Jha gives to Dak the credit for bringing Maithili into the intellectual world for the first time. For him this history goes back to the tenth–eleventh century and he also refutes the claim that Dak was a Buddhist.[213]

In none of the proverbs, Dak mentions his parents' name or that his parents are from different castes. Nevertheless, he does mention himself as Goar. The term Dak Goar appears quite often as together making a very strong case for arguing that Dak was a member of the Goar (Gop/Gwala/Yadav) caste. 'Phagu karai, chait chuk, kirttik nattahi tar, Swati nattahi makh til, kahi gae Dak goar' - "If it rains in the month of Phagun (February-March) urid a (type of lentis) is spoilt; if in the

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[211] Jha. Sadan. 2014. *Dāk Vachan: Proverbial Wisdom from Mithila, Bihar*. Page 44-45
[212] Mishra, Tarakant. 1985. *Maithili Loksahitya Ka Adhyayan*. Patna: Janaki Prakāshan. Page 380
[213] Jha. Sadan. 2014. *Dāk Vachan: Proverbial Wisdom from Mithila, Bihar*. Page 47-48

month of Chait (March-April), lemons; if in the asterism of Krittika (about middle of May) the toddy palms; and if in that of Swati (latter part of October) beans and sesame; saith Dak the Goar.[214] In several proverbs, Dak address the people of particular caste directly or describe the traits of different castes. A proverb related to the timing for the planting of banana plants says, 'kahay Dak to sunah babhan, Kera ropi ashadh sawan' (Dak says O' Babhan plant bananas in ashadh or sawan; the word Babhan is used both for Bhumihars as well as Brahmans in north Bihar[215]. The name 'Dak' along with caste identity 'Goar' is widely found in the Maithili proverbs 'Dak vachan'. These proverbs connect with every aspect of life farming, weather, astrology, etc. while discussing various social, psychological or ethical issues. They are expressed in a variety of ways, most of them are quite raw and rustic which appear as developed through a natural process by the Commons whereas others are quite structured seem to be authored by the linguist, astrologer, poet like Dak or others and so on. However, the important aspect is the

Banana Tree, Mithila painting (Source- pintrest.com)

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[214] Christian, John. 1891 (reprint 1986). *Behar Proverbs.* Page 208
[215] Jha. Sadan (2014) Dāk Vachan: Proverbial Wisdom from Mithila, Bihar. Page 39

collective nature of such knowledge base, a vast range of things, activities, phenomena, etc. are experienced in ages undergone through trial-and-error, analysed through an organic process and then articulated as the proverbial wisdom.

Proverbs as collective folk wisdom

Another line of thought may be that these proverbs are simply the folk wisdom, the collective knowledge of the Commons which was developed, spread and exchanged between different regions same as other many things travelled across the vast area like spiritual movements, trade activities, arts and artefacts, as well as various other types of knowledge. This collective knowledge may have possibly been practiced and popularised by certain poets or singers time-to-time who added their contribution to the repertoire and were gradually conceived as owners of the collective creation and later, propagated according to the popular notion of elite ownership. Another possibility behind the name comes in proverbs which are supposed to be the creators', might be an effort towards coining a term not addressing a human but with an objective meaning. It is also possible to use these names as to make the proverbs in a narrative form, for example – the word Dak means 'calling', 'a message' or the word 'Ghagh' means cleaver or astute. Any community collective is the combined efforts of individuals living in that particular period of time. If at all it is considered as an individual pursuit of knowledge, still the vastness of knowledge seems to be beyond the capacity of any particular individual. The range of discussion and reflections found in these proverbs is certainly the collective work of many, nevertheless articulated in different ways of expressions by a few. ''The wisdom of many and the wit of one' – some on who has treasured up and kept ready for use in a concentrated and palatable form the

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essence of practical wisdom, by availing ourselves of which we become possessed of a clear sight and take a ready view of intricate matters, to unravel which for ourselves would require a disproportionate expenditure of time and mental labour'[216]. This proverb suggests a combination of natural fertilizers to aid the growth of coconut tree – 'Gua gobar, bansahi maint, baanjh nariker sikkait kait! Ole kurkut, chhahe maan, badhay falay e Dakak gaan – cut off the creepers coming out of the root of the sterile coconut tree and put there a mixture of soil taken from the stocked cow dung, the soil from the root of bamboo tree as well as solid kurkut (thatch).' Such common knowledge base coming out of the long-drawn collective practice is handy and available for Commons.

''A few are no doubt of classical origin and are traceable to well-known works such as great epics, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, etc. Others are the remarkable sayings of local people, seers and astrologers…Others again, are no doubt the sayings of clever villagers, being the outcome of experience or of popular superstition'[217]. Any effort towards granting the ownership of such vast array of folk wisdom to a few would actually be contrary to the essence of collectively. The rustic nature and common base of this knowledge system in contrast with the ''ties between these folk sayings and the wider discourse of astronomy which is largely dominated by Brahmanical Sanskrit-centred scholarship…implies that Dāk vachan and its wisdom have duly been used not as an inferior or lower body of knowledge… Nevertheless, the recognition given to Dak may be seen as a delicate strategy adopted by the dominant knowledge system for its own sake and for its own survival. By giving due space to Dak, the Brahmanic science has actually been consuming the folk knowledge traditions… Dak has been internalised and

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[216] Christian, John. 1891 (reprint 1986). *Behar Proverbs.* Pages vii-viii
[217] Christian, John. 1891 (reprint 1986). *Behar Proverbs.* Pages xxxix-xxx

given recognition at the epistemological level only to refute the claims of lower castes to be in possession of an equally beautiful and rich body of knowledge…In the region of Mithila, there is a world which is informed by these sayings and influenced by them. This world knows both the text and its author. There is another world which is influenced by these sayings but does not know the name of the author…the human figure of the author is replaced with the figure of collective social practices and traditions of the land.[218] Besides revisiting the politics of knowledge, this argument is important with regards to studying the construction process of traditional knowledge with authenticity and with an inclusive approach. The folk wisdom is a repertoire of collective knowledge experienced, time-tested with trial-and-error, devised, co-constructed and articulated by the Commons, shared between generation to generation across the culture and exchanged with other cultures across the humanity.

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[218] Jha. Sadan. 2014. *Dāk Vachan: Proverbial Wisdom from Mithila, Bihar*. Page 57

Chapter 9

Conclusion

A variety of cultures, creative traditions, argumentative thought processes and the heritage of socio-cultural synthesis and constructions are well-assimilated into the Indian society. There are multiple perspectives exist, related to human life, social system, ethical norms, construction of knowledge, or metaphysical inquiries. This study has delved into some of these questions of human-social interactions and explored a flourishing knowledge base developed and interpreted through a range of cultural practices in Mithila. There is a growing worldwide interest in the interdisciplinary study of humanities and their applications. Traditional Knowledge is being studied as an active and fluid community collective with a view that tradition is not static. The study has focused on knowledge development in the domain of culture, empirical aspects of that knowledge base in society, and its influence on life in Mithila.

Mithila

A cultural region that incorporates the sensibilities of people from North Bihar, adjacent Terai Nepal, and parts of Jharkhand and the Maithil diaspora. The criteria of this demarcation are the common language, Maithili (and related dialects like Bajjika and Angika), as well as the common cultural practices.[219] Philosophy has

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[219] Mishra, Jayakanta. 1949. *A History of Maithili Literature*. Pages 9 and 16

been developed as an academic discipline in Mithila, including the development of the major school of philosophy (applied logic) Nyaya and Navya Nyaya (the ancient and modern)[220] and contributions to the other major schools of Vaisesika, Samkhya, Mimansa and Vedanta, and important mutual relations with Jainism and Buddhism.[221] Mithila is popularly known for its scholars, however, which constitutes only a part of Mithila's intellect, and a vast array of knowledge exists among the common people. This study has explored these domains of knowledge, expressions and the contribution of the common people. This study has specifically focused on the philosophical explorations that the Commons[222] (common people) of Mithila have been doing for ages.

Research Questions

The study has tried to answer three broad questions: (1) What are the major traditions of philosophical knowledge in Mithila and how they have developed? (2) How do these philosophical knowledge traditions inspire various socio-cultural domains of people's lives? (3) How philosophy is practiced by the Commons through their cultural practices, e.g. Oral traditions, Literature, Artefacts, Painting, Music, Theatre, Rituals, Social system, Traditional Skills and Schools of thought?

Culture can be taken as a human invention, reflects in the 'pattern of living' or 'way of life', constituted by social systems and institutions. For this study, the

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[220] Bhattacharya, Dineshchandra. 1958. *History of Navya-Nyaya in Mithila*. Page 1
[221] Thakur, Upendra. 1964. Studies in Jainism and Buddhism in Mithila. Pages 19, 80 and 126
[222] The term 'Commons' used throughout this study denotes the 'common people of Mithila' in a collective manner. The term does not limit the subject - the people, based on any criteria of caste, creed, gender, set of particular skills or intellect, high status or privilege or status. The term refers to those people or the entity who constitute the culture of Mithila.

aspects of culture in the form of thoughts, words, and actions prominently governed by the knowledge tradition, have been discussed. Philosophy is a critical self-analysis of a particular culture. ''Philosophy is the means by which every culture provides itself with justification for its values, beliefs and worldview and also serves as a catalyst for progress…It is not only that culture that influences philosophy but…philosophy needs culture in order to be expressed.''[223] In this study, Philosophy is taken into the public domain exploring philosophical thirst and inquiries found among the common people and reflected through cultural practices.

Research Framework

The study has taken a conceptual framework based on the interrelation between the ideas, concepts, principles, perspectives, and practices in a particular cultural setting. All of them are different forms of knowledge. The interrelation is cyclic in nature, ideas emerge from the practices, developed, and inform further practices. The study has taken a research framework based on the philosophical concepts prominently reflect in the cultural practices. The concepts have served as the hypothetical ground for this investigation into the intricacies of how culture and creativity are conceived, practiced and transformed into knowledge. The prime focus is on the empirical inquiry into the subject as well as including and going beyond the interpretations of the practices, found in popular narratives.

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[223] Takov, Peter. & Tosam, Mbih J. (Ed.). 2016. *The Role of Philosophy in Culture*. Page 6-7

Concepts

The study has considered six concepts including Collective Expression, Critical Consciousness, Triad of Nature, Human and Divine, Social Fabric, Community Co-existence, and Folk Wisdom through which seven different cultural practices Folklore, Theatre Arts, Musical Expression, Visual Expression, Genealogical Records (Panji Prabandh), Traditional Occupational Skills, and Dak Vachan have been discussed respectively. The concepts are the core of the discussion on the cultural practices of traditional philosophical knowledge. The metaphysical (spirituality and faith), aesthetic (beauty and pleasure), and social (system and positioning of individual/community) elements are overarching all the practices.

Collective Expression

"Folk" can refer to "any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor…(and) has some traditions that it calls its own".[224] Folk represents the people who form the community based on their collectivity, and folklore becomes the account of that collectivity, which is expressed through various cultural and creative means. The folklores have been studied to see the various aspects of collective expressions. Largely, the folklores in Mithila are named after the local deities or heroes – both male and female representing the particular communities. The local deities can be distributed in four different types- the Family deity, Community deity, Village deity, and Vedic/Hindu/Tantric gods/goddesses. The followers of Islam called Muslims in general, though have religious uniformity, are also divided into similar types of communities and have a

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[224] Dundes, Alan. 1965. *The Study of Folklore*. Page 2

profession-based identity. Some of those communities also believe in certain deities including Meer Sultan/ Meera sahib. The practice of folklore can be distributed in three major sections - Lore (references –story etc.), Ritual (Gahwar – Shrine, and Worship), and Portrayal of the lore through four types of artistic representations - Mahrai (Singing/ballad), Nach (Theatre), Chitrakala/Bhittichitra (Painting/Mural), and Murtikala (Sculpture). Lore is the verbal (and other) reference largely developed, preserved and practiced as an oral tradition, are the stories around the deities, their life events, their deeds, and their journey as leaders of the related communities. The ritualistic aspect of folklore consists of the everyday worship in Gahwar (shrine), the annual festive celebration, and the Baithki (special worship) by the Bhagat (priest) organised for individual households or families.

The performances and presentations of folklores have seen many changes in their form, style, execution, etc. Above all, folklore is the brainchild of a community and various presenters have added different flavours to it. Somehow, the artists and creators have their distinct ways of perceiving things and different methodologies for execution. In the visual arts, a great deal of imagination, symbolic representation, use of colours, patterns, and a variety of artefacts are visible. Similarly in dramatic acts of folklore, that reflects in the techniques like details of sequence, variety of enactment, varied characterization, use of music- songs and rhythm, movement, improvisation, and so on. Generally, particular folklore depicts the sensibilities of a particular community, and it is formulated and developed by the community itself. A community (caste) identity is expressed through community-specific folklores and related deities/heroes. However, participation in the related rituals and portrayal goes beyond the community. The heroes though portrayed as kings or leaders and are well-positioned in the community, adhering

to the traditional occupation and other norms. Interestingly, the protagonists of these folklores do not appear to resist these norms, nevertheless, they present the value of that work and fight to establish it. Through these folklores, the community becomes vocal about their stand and right.

The folklores do provide a spiritual or religious framework for their followers. It can be seen through two major lines of thought – first, a search for a parallel system and second, associating with the mainstream system. The former thought process lies in the religious hegemony and subsequent infringement of rights to access religious or spiritual practices, whereas the latter lies either in the urge for social co-existence or in the effort of creating the discourse against religious monopoly. The followers have their own experience and account of connecting with the deities through various activities, music, meditation (invocation) e.g. a Bhagat's way to connect, and various rituals. These commoners' heroes are conceptualized in the folklores as the resistance to the exploiting forces including the dominating religious practices.[225] The urge for social co-existence reflects in the adaptation of prevalent notions of religion including the perception of gods, myths, rituals, etc. The folklores talk about how their protagonists are humanly rooted, compassionate for people's welfare, keep social concerns on priority, and lead the disadvantaged in the struggle against the mighty and destructive forces. They live a life of a particular community but establish dialogues with other communities.

Right from rituals to the performance of folklore, a collective approach is visible. An integral section of the ritual of family deity/community deity is the worship of

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[225] Kumar, Sunil. 2018. *Lokala aur Sahitya ke Aaine men Salhes*. Webpage. Accessed 18 October 2020.

'Chaudah Debaan'[226] (fourteen deities) including one chief deity (debaan) of the worshipper community and thirteen associate deities belonging to different communities (including a Muslim hero Meera sahib/Meer Sultan and prominent Vedic/Hindu gods/goddesses). the collective belief in these deities brings forth the aspect of inclusivity, acceptance, and plurality. One may argue that superstitious beliefs towards unforeseen circumstances make the people god-fearing and they end up believing more and more of such things. That might be true, nevertheless, such a thing can be seen from a social perspective in which collective living and interdependence are the chief components. Also, a general sensibility or tendency to find uniformity or commonness is found among human societies despite all the prevalent notions of odds and differences.

The folklore represents the sensibility, belief, history, notions, and overall life of the related community. Art and aesthetics give the language to the perception, intuition, or notion of people/communities based on certain faith, belief, or references from history or life. That is further encoded and expressed through various oral traditions/textual forms/visual arts as well as the diverse range of performances. The followers, viewers, receivers or thinkers decode them, comprehend them, and share their understanding with others. The cultural region of Mithila is a conjugation of diverse communities and their respective sensibilities. The age-old folklores of Mithila form a knowledge tradition, the knowledge of so-called uncivilized or unsophisticated, disadvantaged and marginalised evolved and developed on the periphery of alleged civilized society.

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[226] Yadav, Yaduvir. 5 October 2020. *Mithilak Lokgatha: Anushthan evam Prastuti*. Interview.

Critical Consciousness

Mithila's theatre art has its unique journey and it has influenced the various aspects of life. The concept of critical consciousness is reflected in the characterisation of the aspects of life, the discussion, and the mode of expression. Besides devising the artistic expressions clubbed with various aesthetic values, these practices continuously open up various debates around human/social values, social issues and social justice. The theatre practices of Mithila can broadly be classified into three genres, Folk Theatre, Unified Folk/Classical Theatre, and Contemporary Theatre. Folk theatre can further be categorised into Nach and Women's Theatre. The substantial content of women's theatre is also derived from the folklores and has ritualistic value, however, that is more connected with everyday life in terms of characters and sequences, as compared to Nach. However, the women's theatre is confined to the courtyard of their houses whereas Nach is a public affair.   The notion of the practice lies in the tradition of art practiced by women secretly within a confined limit of expression. However, that barrier seems to be at a physical level or in limiting the public expression of women, imposed by the male-dominated society. That is also reflected in the late participation of Maithil women even in the modern theatre or in the urban setting of the alleged civilized society of the upper community, the first-ever participation in the late 1970s.[227] Ironically, their free expressions on various topics like the men-women relationship, sex life, or women's plight, are labelled as vulgarity, their effort to break the confinement is seen as irresponsibility or hostility and so the chauvinists do not approve of any public appearance of women. The most striking things are the form, content, and style of the performance. The improvisation-based acts full of music and movements, spontaneous dialogues, and references to daily life depict a range of

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[227] Mishra, Jaykanta. 1988. *Maithili Scene: Drama Forges Ahead.* Indian Literature. Page 53.

subjects related to women, largely ignored in the male-dominated society. The women from every community participate but they organize it separately i.e. the women do this in their respective communities which means artists (women) are divided. That seems another confinement. Nevertheless, the participants from a mixed social status come together and theatre practice seems to be the main driving force.

During the Vaishnava/Bhakti and allied reformist movements from the 12th century CE onwards, various performing art forms were developed and become the most effective medium to connect, mobilise, and engage the people. Theatre practices in Mithila also got a new form, a kind of unified folk/classical form. Sanskrit dramatists in Mithila had taken a new turn from the earlier ones by introducing Sanskrit, Prakṛit, and Maithili in their dramatic creations of these three languages, Sanskrit, however, was the prominent one. The tri-lingual dramas played a very prominent part in integrating the Commons at large and also in developing the people's language',[228] the form is called Kirtaniya Natya. The name 'Kirtaniya' is contested among the Maithil scholars, nevertheless, it was a kind of 'Bhasha Sangeetak' (a vernacular derivative of Sanskrit classical theatre), which initiated a unified theatre setting in which the playwright was the Sanskrit scholar and the performers were the folk artists. The inclusion of folk performers was due to the severe resistance to theatre among the scholars' fraternity[229]. The handful of scholars, though restricted themselves only to writing the plays, ventured out for their creative urge and thus, a unification took place. Kirtania itself had two streams, one that was for the scholarly or elite audience and the other for the common mass, that is why 'the former is sophisticated and formal, whereas the

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[228] Hati, Somdatta. 2017. *Dhūrtasamāgama: A study*. Page 1011
[229] Malangia. Mahendra. 2009. *Maithili Loknatyak Vistrit Adhyayan evam Vishleshan*. Page 51.

latter is more natural, easy, intelligible, simple, direct, and informal'.[230] The Kirtaniya tradition of Mithila flowed out to two other directions and kept inspiring each-other, the Ankia Natya of Assam and Upatyaka (Terai) Natya of Nepal. This unified folk/classical theatre has had unique structural development, aesthetics, longevity, performance elements, and cultural impact on the region. It also depicts the democratization of arts that could be seen in the active participation of the folk artists from the lower community (and Muslims, later) who were illiterate, and had no advanced knowledge of the grammar of theatre.

The term 'contemporary' refers to the present context of Maithil life and its theatre arts. It also discusses the new waves and patterns of artistic expression. The two sections 'Elemental Folk' and 'Modern hybrid' discuss the two aspects, first, the revival of the traditional theatre with a modern lens or simply presenting the relevant concept or content with the help of folk elements. Second, the inclusion and influence of modern Indian theatre as well as world theatre, on both the content and form. These two sections have been complementary and supplementary to each-other. The revival or re-interpretation of traditional (folk/classical) theatre got a leap forward through the works of orientalists, linguists, and anthropologists. The modern hybrid format was developed with the foremost effect of realistic styles and dealt with more critical or radical themes. Theatre in Mithila has seen a paradigm shift. The ancient folk tradition helped in the foundation of the medieval unified folk-classical form and after its downfall, rejuvenated the dying theatre tradition, and did hand-hold the development of modern theatre. The core element of this critical consciousness in the society of Mithila is the Commons, who have been the bearer of the culture. Indigenousness is found throughout the history of theatre arts and other cultural practices. At the

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[230] Mishra, Jayakanta. 1949. *A History of Maithili Literature*. Page 358.

end of the day, Mithila comes up as a rooted society no matter how much the alleged civilised section of the society discards the essence of folk or ignores the value of ingenuousness. The modern theatrical sensibility is on the one hand engrossed with the aesthetics of theatre in its natural and indigenous form, the Nach, and on the other hand, it is continuously becoming critical, radical, and sensitive towards human and social values. Though the challenge for sustainability is certainly a big challenge for the theatre practitioners and the society, the sustained efforts being made by the practitioners and promoters present a ray of hope.

Triad of Nature, Human and Divine

A discussion around the creation of the universe, the supreme creator, and the creator-creation relationship is widespread in every culture. It goes further to understanding the interconnectedness between oneself and the ultimate self. The communion – triad of nature, human and divine is found in the visual and musical traditions in Mithila. Here, 'nature' refers to the entities/objects other-than-human whereas 'divine' refers to the imperceptible supreme force. Both in visual and musical expressions, the human emotions, thoughts, social living and the psychic-spiritual exploration of the divine are illustrated through the symbols derived from nature - its elements, attributes, objects and phenomena. These constituents of nature embody various aspects of human life and represent that through nature's language.

Visual expressions can be seen in five different types of arts and artefacts. Based on the magnitude of practice, it can broadly be categorised into Painting, Carving

Art, Pottery, Sikki Grass Weaving, and Sujni Embroidery. The variety of work can also be understood in terms of motifs, forms, styles, contents, and applications. Painting, Sikki, and Sujni works are mostly led by women artists whereas Pottery and other carving arts are the combined works by both men and women. There are various aspects of creativity or artistic expression of life and other socio-cultural facets like livelihood, custom, community connections, etc. attached with the practices. Some of these works are created in connection to particular occasions like rituals or festivals or for a certain utility or decoration whereas there are various examples of free artistic expressions related to folklore or epics or contemporary issues, etc.

The creative process these artistic creations are based on, is cyclic and fluid in nature which begins with certain observations of the world around or particular imagination inspired/affected by some motivating factors. That undergoes through an inner process and comes out as an artistic expression. The concept and perspective developed through the process build the understanding and strengthens the belief-system. The learning from the process enriches the subsequent cycle of the creative process further. A spirituality experiences itself as supported by both the spiritual and the physical dynamics of the cosmic-earth processes, and brings the human, the other-than-human and the Divine into a communion that permits us to discover ourselves in the universe just as the universe discovers itself in us'.[231] Most of these forms of visual expressions in Mithila philosophize and symbolize the human sensibilities to the nature and divine, and finds out the meaning of life. The aspect of triad of nature, human and divine reflects in the interconnection

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[231] O'Hara, Dennis Patrick. 2015. *Thomas Berry's Understanding of the Psychic- Spiritual Dimension of Creation: Some sources*. Accessed 24 March 2021.

through various processes of encoding, decoding, creation of symbols, and interpretation through motifs, patterns, content, and concept.

Mithila has also housed a range of inter/intra human and nature-human explorations in the field of music. The huge repertoire of Maithili music can be seen as certain representations of the aspects of individual and social life (human emotions - pain, pleasure, devotion, love, spirit of community, etc.) or association with particular occasions (rituals, festivals, agricultural activities, etc.), relationship with nature (seasons, river, etc.) or musical story-telling such as the ballads in Folklore, poetry/songs in musical theatre and Women's Theatre performances. Maithili music in terms of the types of their practices can be studied under two heads of traditional and folk music. These two terms 'Traditional' and 'Folk' are sometimes used interchangeably owing to the commonness of practice and practitioner. The traditional music has bases in the timeless folk and the folk music is practiced traditionally. In this study, the two terms are taken for the purpose of classification based on the aspects of commonness and timelessness of practice (folk) as well as the development of certain practice at a particular point of time and sustained practice thereafter (traditional). The folk music can be classified into five types, based on particular cultural associations and their representations – Personal Expression, Social Living, Rites and Rituals, Relation with Nature as well as Dialogue with Divine. The traditional music can be grouped in four different types – Vidyapati Sangeet, Sect-specific (Panth/Math) music tradition, Music Gharana as well as Epos & Ballad. The common core of these two major traditions of painting and music in Mithila is the creator, the women as well as the cyclic and fluid creative process, begins with certain observations of the world around or particular imagination inspired/affected by some motivating factors. Mithila painting and music decode these constituents of nature and apply that language in

their expressions, for example, the songs like batgamani or kohbar depict women's semiotic expressions of love, union, separation, sexuality and so on. In the nirgun songs, the dialogues with the divine and the discussion around the truth of life, death, the devotion to the divine, the ethical living and duty towards nature and divine are interpreted through different symbols like oath, agreement, travelers, parrot burnt and fly etc. Though, this vast repertoire of the art developed in ages owe to every creator of the art, the Commons and of course the biggest source of inspiration the nature, the creator's psychic-spiritual journey as well as the essence of divinity, nevertheless the contributions of women are immense.

Social Fabric

The fabric of society is woven or structured and organized by processes and norms. The social system and positioning of the units of society are part of that social fabric. The integrity of society can be metaphorically depicted as the compactness of the fabric called 'Gups' in Maithili which depends on how evenly or impartially the units of society are cohered. In Mithila, the underlying social structure is influenced by a number of factors, one of them being the genealogical basis practiced as the system of genealogical records called Panji Prabandh in Mithila. The extent of the role of Panji Prabandh in structuring Mithila's society has been discussed along with the aspects of social stratification within and beyond the periphery of the particular practicing community. Similarly, the influence on the overall society through the synthesis of the system based allegedly on 'Purity', 'Stringent Social order', 'Domination by control', etc. are important in this regard. The historical account presents the factors behind its initiation and development. The philosophical treatise 'Tantra Vaartik' by the Mimansa philosopher Kumaril

Bhatt' from the 7th century mentions one of the ancient most genealogical references called 'Samuh Lekhya' (collective records) that which the learned people would keep as records of their origin (32 generations) and introduce themselves accordingly. The system of genealogical records of the 7th century Mithila, later adopted by Bengal and Assam was remodified.[232] In 1326, with the help of King Harsinghdev, the learned people of Mithila started structuring the practice. The records include information like Gotra, Pravar, Mool, Mool-Gram (changed location of residence), Painjh (the title given to a family which is the name of a learned person associated with that family), etc. There have been seven types of Panji including Mool, Shakha, Gotr, Patr, Dushan, Utedh and Aswajanya Patr Panji. Several inter-caste/inter-religion relationships or unknown relationships are documented in Dushan Panji (said to be accepted by society). For example, it is mentioned that the great Nyaya philosopher Gangesh Upadhyaya, famous for his treatise Tatva Chintamani, was born after 5 years of his father's death.

Genealogy has been discussed for edges in all over the world, including its linkages with social-cultural, medical science and philosophical domains of knowledge and practices. In social life, the records of lineage are kept in a different form which helps to track the blood relation between generations and genetic analysis. On the biological front and in relation to medical science, a study among the Pakistani community at Bradford (United Kingdom) concludes that the number of babies born with birth defects in Bradford is nearly double the national average. The core finding is confirmation that consanguineous marriage is a major risk factor for Congenital abnormalities (CAs).[233] The speciality of Panji lies in the uniqueness of the documentation and effort of the people associated. These are the

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[232] Jha, Pankaj Kumar. *National Culture and the Imagined Community: 'The Panji Prabandha of Mithila'*. Pages 1198-1203
[233] *Cousin marriage and congenital anomalies in a multiethnic birth cohort*. (2013). Page 229

range of records of Commons unlike the historical documents which tend to be made for the powerful only. The start of such social system may have been some scientific bases through the ancient trial-n-error method which is evident in other cultural and livelihood practices like medicines, food, housing etc. The criticism of the system at socio-cultural front is the stratification based on the ideas of structuring the individual life and its social positioning based on the genealogical idea. The Panji system and related social norms and practices need to address the conflict between human values and social norms and reflect upon the victimisation of the females, the disadvantaged communities or certain exploited sections of communities. The compactness of the social fabric depends on the integrity of society that depends on how evenly or impartially the units of society are cohered. The more a society favours an egalitarian ethos in its construction and functioning system, the more it develops evenly and flourishes.

Folk Wisdom

A common knowledge base that originates from the shared practices, beliefs, opinions or experience of Commons through a collective construction of knowledge and tested by a trail-n-error process is developed and internalised as a tradition of folk wisdom. Such wisdom related to the Commons' life is found across the culture and perhaps, exist since the early stages of human evolution. But their charm is not simply to be found in their being artefacts of an earlier day, or in their brevity and wit, but in the way, they draw upon, and reflect, the common human experiences that are shared across time and space.''[234] Somehow, these commonalities among the varied cultures present the intellect and creativity of the

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[234] Stone, Jon R. (2006). *The Routledge Books of World Proverbs*. Page xiii

Commons on the one hand and the development of a collective knowledge base tried and tested by the generations on the other. It also traces a common thread which connects societies in terms of knowledge sharing, the basis of such similarities may be the invention and spread of agriculture and related trade and subsequent mutual exchanges of thoughts, ideas and experience. Dak Vachan and other proverbs as a collective construction of knowledge applied as a common knowledge base are found as folk wisdom in Mithila. These proverbs include different episodes of everyday life, rites and rituals, construction of houses, agricultural activities, rain, weather, family life, travel, unprecedented events, astrology (Varshphal), moral issues, etc. In this study, some of the proverbs are elaborated which depict the aspects of life metaphorically as well as other proverbs which talk about human and animal psychology. The study has focused on the construction of knowledge while discussing the collective nature of these proverbs as shared folk wisdom. Dak Vachan is found in different forms including one-liners, rhyming couplets or stanzas in the languages of Maithili and its predecessors like Avhatt, that describe several walks of the Commons' life and shared wisdom. These proverbs can be studied through different standpoints, approaches or the aspects of meaning-making. Nature, the natural phenomena and their effect on the human as well as intricacies of the human relationship are also defined through using the attributes of natural objects. That somehow presents an epistemic tool based on the source/object of knowledge derived from nature, as also explored as the 'language of nature' as discussed with reference to musical expression and visual expression. This aspect of nature can be studied separately. These proverbs serve not only as figure of speech which add a special flavour to the language, but are also the poetic representation of knowledge full of humor, satire and wit. They are profound, experiential and sometime very direct which often sound ridiculous. The meanings of these proverbs are mostly multi-

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dimensional i.e. more than one meaning. Largely, the composition of these proverbs is illustrative with the use of concrete and experiential instances/examples of life. The important aspect is the collective nature of such knowledge base, a vast range of things, activities, phenomena, etc. are experienced in ages undergone through trial-and-error, analysed through an organic process and then articulated as the proverbial wisdom. The collective knowledge of the Commons which was developed, spread and exchanged between different regions same as other many things travelled across the vast area like spiritual movements, trade activities, etc. This collective knowledge may have possibly been practiced and popularised by certain poets or singers time-to-time who added their contribution to the repertoire and were gradually conceived as owners of the collective creation and later, propagated according to the popular notion of elite ownership. In the region of Mithila, there is a world which is informed by these sayings and influenced by them. This world knows both the text and its author. There is another world which is influenced by these sayings but does not know the name of the author…the human figure of the author is replaced with the figure of collective social practices and traditions of the land.[235] Besides revisiting the politics of knowledge, this argument is important with regards to studying the construction process of traditional knowledge with authenticity and with an inclusive approach. Folk wisdom is a repertoire of collective knowledge experienced, time-tested with trial-and-error, devised, co-constructed and articulated by the Commons, shared between generation to generation across the culture and exchanged with other cultures across the humanity.

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[235] Jha. Sadan. 2014. *Dāk Vachan: Proverbial Wisdom from Mithila, Bihar*. Page 57

Afterwards…

This study has specifically focused on the philosophical explorations that the Commons of Mithila have been doing for ages through their cultural practices. These knowledge explorations may have set the grounds for the disciplinary development of philosophical knowledge in the region. The underlying notion behind this argument may be that culture is the creation for which philosophy provides the basis and insights whereas cultural practices form, enrich and improve philosophical knowledge. Cultural practices are the manifestation of the culture in which different philosophical ideas, as well as principles, are inherent and both complement each other. Philosophy provides the critical reflection and analysis of the cultural practices in any particular social setting and that provides the direction to the society. The commons' contribution to the development of knowledge as well as the resilience and perseverance of these weak socio-economic communities towards maintaining the social cohesiveness in the region have always helped Mithila evolve, develop, sustain, be rooted and be alive.

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Submitted to Indira Gandhi National Center for Arts, Delhi and IGNCA Regional Center, Ranchi

April 2022

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