

# Aripana Art of Mithila Culture in Nepal: A Study of Symbols and Significance

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## Abstract

Nepal is a small and landlocked but richest country in diverse natural and cultural resources that are considered our heritage. Not only status and glory, but the unique identity of our nation is also represented by the temples, monasteries, images, different art forms, feasts, festivals, the mountains, rivers, forests, lakes as well as various beautiful places. Rest of the different art forms, Aripana is an important cultural heritage of Mithila region in Nepal. It is a floor painting painted especially on the court yard of the houses and other buildings in Mithila region, hence it is known as an amazing art heritage of Maithili culture. Mithila region and

Maithili culture has advanced tradition of creating different forms of art both in religious and secular motifs. Among them as the floor painting Aripana is considered beautiful creation through the perspective of cultural heritage of not only in Mithila region but entire the nation. Although it is still not properly recognized among the scholars and researchers as the matters of study and research, hence, several aspects of Aripana painting is still remained under research. It is its research gaps and research problems as well. Therefore, for addressing the gaps and problems this paper has been prepared. The main aim of this paper is to explore and highlight the concept of Aripana painting, history and practices, creating methods and materials, types and typology, symbol and significant of such type of cultural heritage of Mithila region and Nepal as well.

**Keywords:** Aripana painting, history and practices, methods and materials, type and typology, tantric influence, folk artists and craftsmanship, symbols and significant

## 1. Introduction

Mithila does have a long history of human settlement, culture and civilization. In ancient period it was known as *Videha* kingdom. For the first time *Satapatha Brahman* mentioned about the Mithila region. Latter, the other Sanskrit, Buddhist and Jain literatures also describe it as a holy place and separate kingdom of *Videha*. According to *Satapatha Brahman* in ancient time it was covered by forests and wasteland where non Aryan peoples were settled. After the entrance of the *Madhav Videha* and *Gautam Rahugan* with *Baiswanar*, this region was become agro-land and gradually developed as a centre of Aryan culture (Jha, 1983, pp. 1-4). In this respect Pandey (2008, 171) states that:

The Kingdom of Mithila extended in the past from Himalayas in the north to Ganges on the south and between the *Koshi* and *Gandaki* rivers. The ancient texts enumerate that 15 rivers irrigated the land of Mithila. The kingdom was known by the names *Yajnakshetra*, *Videh* and *Tirabhukti* i.e. *Tirhut* also. These names indicate that the kingdom of Mithila, located on the border of India, inhabited by the seers and ascetics and was one of the most celebrated centers of rituals and sacrifices and of diverse kinds of socio-religious activities.

*Pauranic* Literatures especially *Vishnu Puran* mentioned *Nimi* was the founder and name giving king of *Videha* kingdom (Thakur, 1956, p. 30). *Janak*, the son of *Rasworoma* was the 22th descendent of *Nimi* dynasty (Jha, 1983, pp. 33-38). King *Janak* was a famous and learned king of Mithila i.e. present *Janakpur*. His palace consisted of great philosophers and learned people. He gave great importance to the soul than body. So he was called *videha*. *Janakpur* is a city, believed to be the birthplace of Goddess *Sita* and the place of her marriage with Lord Ram. It is also known as the City of Ponds and Mithila *Terai* culture. Here you can learn more about the ancient and revered Hindu epic, the Ramayana and its significance today. In this regard Rana (2021, p. 74) mentions that:

Mithila, a Hindu society, has the influence of patriarchal *Vedantic* civilization. The society observes Hindu religious practices and rituals, on the one hand, and develops its own faith, beliefs and value systems on the other hand that at times tend to contrast with

the religious practices of the Indian subcontinent. However, Mithila has advanced a good balance between the religious and secular practices so as to seek meanings in their lives, that is, a good equilibrium between the spiritual and material realities of the world.

The great state of Mithila, which is famed for its myths, tales, and extensive past, makes up about half of Nepal's eastern region. The majority of these names originate from the Janak Dynasty, who ruled the Mithila region (<https://www.kingsframingandartgallery.com>).

At present, Mithila region is extended into the different territories of Nepal and India as well. *Madhubani, Darbhanga, Sitamadi, Mujefarpur, Saharsa, Bhagalpur, Purniya*, North *Munger, Jharkhanda* districts of India and *Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Siraha, Sarlahi, Dhanusha and Mahottari* districts of Nepal were belonged to Mithila region in the past (Bimal, 2070, p. 32). *Janakpur* was the capital, during rules of King *Janak*, and they have a definite family connection to the king of *Ayodhya* because *Sita*, the daughter of King *Janak*, married King *Dasharath* of *Ayodhya*, whose son Ram is also recognized as the seventh incarnation of God Vishnu. The Janaki temple's wall features a range of handicrafts and paintings that highlight Mithila's religious, historical, and cultural significance. Parts of India borders with *Siraha, Saptari, Dhanusha, Sarlahi*, and *Mahotari* are covered by the eastern area, also referred to as the Mithila region (<https://www.memeraki.com&gt;news>).

The people in the Hilly and Himalayan region do not adhere to the identity, social norms, or values of Nepal's Mithila culture. The Terai belt's Mithila majority, who speak Maithili as their native dialect, may also be claimed to be the majority ethnic group there. The inhabitants of the hilly and Himalayan region do not follow the Mithila culture of Nepal's identity, social customs, or values. It might also be argued that the predominant ethnic group in the Terai belt is the Mithila people, who speak Maithili as their native language (<https://www.outlookindia.com&gt;story>).

All elements of society were introduced to variety and peace through the particular rites of the Mithila people. The Mithila culture is a shining example of the respect, brotherhood, and humanity that each local should uphold. According to the dignified definition of Nepal's Mithila culture, many characteristics, respects, and secrets are yelling loudly for their manifestation. Mithila culture is special and rituals that decently gives the message of unity and diversity with all people and all society. Many people because it is totally different from the Himalayan.

In Mithila region art was not encouraged in the age of the *Brahmanas* and in the Upanishadic scheme of life. During the ruled of King *Janak* dynasty the region was only looked down a source of sensual pleasure (Thakur, 1956, pp. 92-93). Later on, gradually artistic feeling came into existence and plenty of religious and secular art specimens were created in this region which is known as the Mithila art today.

There are problems when Mithila arts are viewed outside of the social semiotics of the area. Most interpretations are based on western perspectives that are unrelated to Mithila culture, tradition, or way of life. When examined through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, the

true and genuine significance of Maithili art are lost. In this context Thames & Rekha (2010 pp. 1-20) have mentioned their view in following manner:

It has also shown how western scholars interpreted *Maithil* art from alien paradigms and created a romanticized history. Women's voices got silenced in the process.... Interpretations internalized and articulated by the artists themselves complicate our understanding of *Maithil* art.

Thus, meanings are required to be drawn not based on any western theoretical criticisms, and the subjective perspectives of the local artists or scholars, but on the socio- cultural context of the Mithila society. The Mithila region produced the *Aripana*, a flower artwork, every day and occasionally on unique occasions. There has always been a cultural transition from one generation to the next. It is now a way of life for the women of Mithila. When *Aripana* is understood, feminine subjectivity is seen as '*sakti*' the spirit or life force that keeps the world going (Rana, 2021, 75). The connection between *Aripana* and Mithila, which is exclusively a Hindu community, illustrates the tantric heritage of '*shakti*' worship. Consequently, Mithila women emphasize the equality of spirit and substance through *Aripana*, encouraging people to utilize both of their resources to the maximum.

Whatsoever, *Aripana* art is the multi-facets cultural heritage in Mithila region, but lacking of adequate study and research several aspects such as appropriate meaning, history and tradition, symbols and significance, causes of creating, using methods and materials, value as an intangible cultural heritage are still in under research. Altogether, all these issues are identified as the huge research gaps and problems of this study. Therefore, through the paper entitled *Aripana Art of Mithila Culture in Nepal: A Study of Symbols and Significance* the researchers hope to minimal bridging to address afore mentioned research gaps and problem.

### *1.1 Research Problems and Gaps*

There are several studies concerning different art forms especially painting have already been conducted but specific studies on the *Aripana* of a floor painting of Maithili culture of Mithila region as an intangible cultural heritage, has still not been carried out so far. There is insufficient

study and research on a number of *Aripana* art themes, including what is *Aripana* painting? what is its history and tradition? how and why it is created? what is the methods and materials that used while creating such painting? how far it is known as intangible cultural heritage of Mithila region? are still remaining unexplored. The aforementioned problems and the identified research

gaps constantly push academics to seek the truth.

### *1.2 Research Objectives*

The goal of this study is to investigate the various facets of Maithili culture's *Aripana* art. The general goals of the study were to explore the appropriate meaning, symbols, and significance of the *Aripana*; to trace out the history and tradition of *Aripana* painting; to explore the causes of its creation and the methods and materials that were used; to inform

other Nepalese researchers and the researchers from abroad for conducting research about the vastness of the subject. During this process, researchers have discussed the historicity of painting, the concept of *Aripana*, and other topics.

## 2. Review of Literature

To view the research challenges, gaps, and concerns, a researcher will utilize the theoretical underpinning as a lens. As a result, it is acknowledged as a crucial instrument for all types of research. Reviewing the literature is only one approach of constructing solid theoretical foundation, thus in this research the following literatures have been reviewed.

Mishra (2003, pp. 93-103) wrote an article named Mithila Paintings: Women's Creativity under Changing Perspectives published in Indian Folklore Research Journal where he traces the etymological relation of the term *Aripana* with Sanskrit. Pandey (2008) wrote a book entitled Nepal through the Ages which is published by adroit publisher from Delhi. In this text Pandey mentions that *Aripana* art is evolved from the female folk of the region and hole cultural life of Mithila, is depicted in it. Therefore, the culture of *Aripana* art, a tradition of flooring design is known as an indigenous identity of the of Mithila region.

Thames & Rekha (2010 pp. 1-20) have written a paper entitled from folk art to fine art: Changing paradigms in the historiography of Mithila painting in the Journal of Art Historiography in 2010. In this article researchers have analyzed the historical development, symbols and significant, the methods and materials, used for the formation of such type of painting in the Mithila region and Maithili culture as well.

Bimal (2070, pp. 1-37) has presented a seminar paper on Nepali *Sanskriti*, Mithila Gaurav and *Rastriyata* (Nepalese Culture, Pride of Mithila and Nationality) on the seminar organized by Nepal Sanskrit University, Centre for National Cultural Studies. In this paper researcher has tried to justified to the Mithila region as an important cultural of Nepal and has also identified Mithila painting in the forms of *Kohbar* and *Alpana* one of the important cultural heritage and separate identity of the region.

Timalsina (2015, p. 31) wrote a book entitled Tantric Visual Culture according to a cognitive approach utilized in the study, the human mind has been creatively expressed in art since the beginning of civilization, whether it be in Paleolithic cave drawings or the pyramid sphinx that depicts a man and a lion. As a result, it would seem that paintings represent the pinnacle of Human culture.

Dulal (2019, pp. 554-565) wrote an article entitled Dasa Mahavidhyas Painted Scroll of National Museum: an Illustrative Art Heritage of Nepal. According to Dulal painting is known as the mother of all other arts and its history of creation predates that of other types of art. Dulal emphasizes the fact that people have been painting since the beginning of time, as he claims.

Rana (2021) has published an article entitled tantric influence in *Aripana* of Mithila through which researcher claims that tantric philosophy, which emphasizes the harmony between the spiritual and material facets of existence, is reflected in the traditional art of floor painting. Tantra has influenced Maithili society, art, and culture, as seen in *Aripana's* usage of tantric

symbols, celebration of bodily demands, acknowledgment of material components, and elevation of feminine power as a fundamental source.

Finally, the literatures mentioned above are based on different perspectives such as historical and cultural, religious and Tantric approaches, but not only one deal with the symbolic meaning and significance aspects of this folk art heritage in detail. Obviously, aforementioned literatures are seemed to base on theoretical approaches and empirical studies which are quite useful for this research work for generating theoretical and empirical knowledge as well.

### 3. Methodology

The paper adopts a descriptive research design and conducts a thorough analysis of the Mithila Region's *Aripana* floor painting tradition. This study is based on a qualitative approach because it covers a variety of topics related to *Aripana* painting, including its significance, meaning, symbols, and history as well as its origins, causes of creation, methods and materials, types, and typology, as well as the work of folk artists and craftspeople. More qualitative information on *Aripana* painting has been used than quantitative information. The procedures and processes were followed in order to research its objectives and create accurate data and information. Researchers employed both primary and secondary data in this investigation. Fieldwork, where relevant primary data have been acquired using observational and interview methods, is the main source for primary data. During conducting the field study, researchers frequently visited the several wards of the *Janakpurdham* Sub-municipality. Journals, books, and many other electronic sources were used to acquire the primary secondary data.

#### 3.1 Conceptual Framework

Along with the clarification of the concept of *Aripana*, this paper helps to explore the symbols and significance, history and tradition, causes of creation, the methods and materials, types and typology, folk artists and craftsmanship, objects and motifs associated with this cultural heritage of Mithila region. Both the primary data and secondary information have been collected and analyzed. For addressing the above mentioned research gaps and problems as well as fulfilling the determine objectives this paper has been prepared by applying the following conceptual framework.

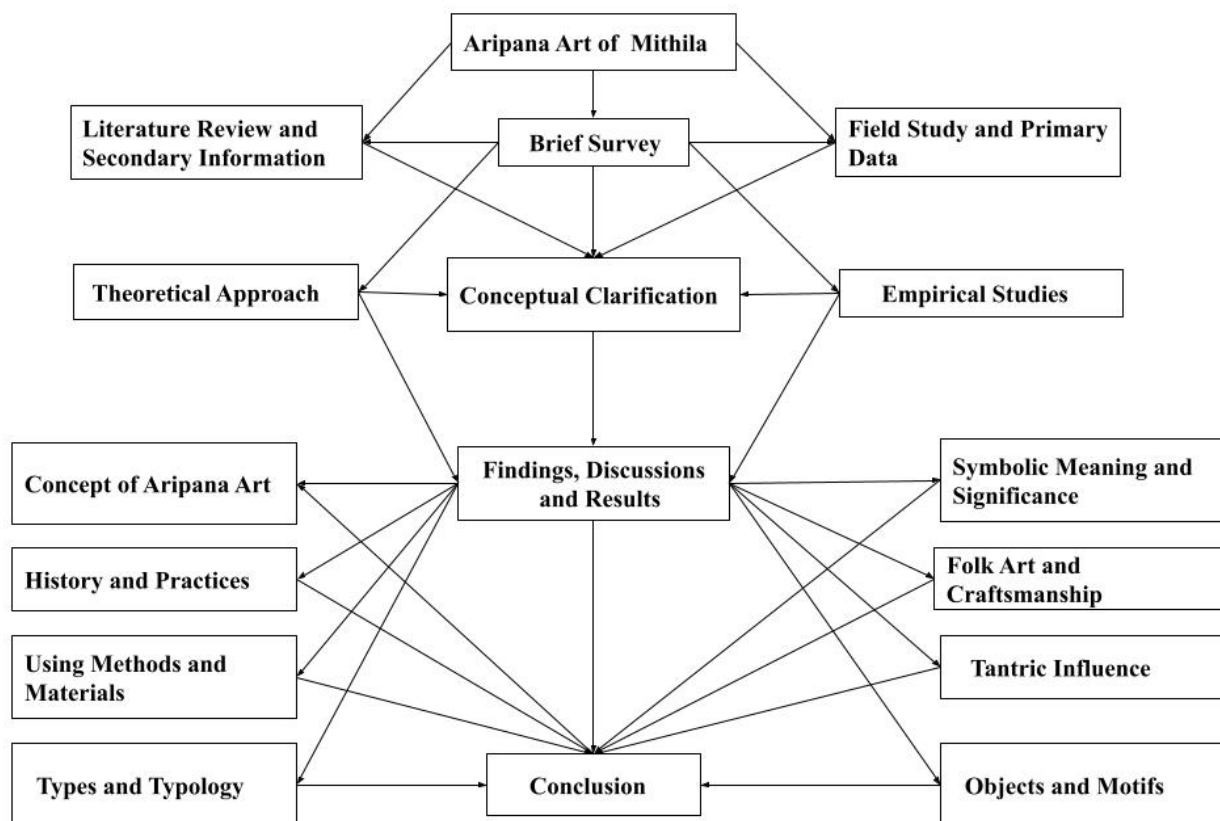


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Source: Developed by the researchers

The figure clearly highlights the adopted conceptual framework of the study. As per the conceptual framework along with the clarification of the concept different issues associated with the *Aripana* floor paintings of Mithila culture have been explored and analyzed.

#### 4. Surveys, Findings, Discussions and Results

Researchers have applied observation and interview methods for collecting primary data during the field survey. On the basis of research objectives researchers have asked what is *Aripana*? How and when is it existed? Why the people of Mithila create this form of art? Which methods and materials they used while creating it? what types of objects and motifs they prefer for creating *Aripana* art? who is the creators? what is its symbolic meaning and significance in Mithila society and culture? to the local people while conducting field work. Finally, after completing field survey the discussion and findings of this paper has presented including the concept, history and tradition, using methods and materials, types and typology, objects and motifs, tantric influence, folk artists and craftsmanship and symbols and significance as well in chronological order. After doing critical discussion of afore mentioned issues, the conclusion of the paper has been drawn.

#### 4.1 Concept of Aripana



Sources: <https://mithilalifestyleandculture.design.blog/>

Generally, *aripanas* are line drawings that are used as floor decorations. The practice of floor painting is practiced in the Mithila region. The source of the word '*Aripana*' which means 'to smear' is '*Alepan*' a Sanskrit word (Mishra, 2003, pp. 93-103). A region that has been magically purified for rituals and domestic religious observances is symbolized by the so-called '*Aripana*' or magic circle. This art may be compared to the *Mehandi* or *Nandana* art of Rajasthan in India, the *Sathia* art of *Gujarat*, the *Rangoli* art of Maharashtra, the *Alpna* art of Bengal, the Mandala art of Tibet, and the *Rangoli* art of Bengal (Pandey, 2008, p. 178).

This exemplifies both the tantric philosophy of *Bhoga*, the sensual pleasure personified by *Aripanas*, and the tantric concept of life, which places an emphasis on uncontrolled sexuality, marriage, and fertility (Rana, 2021, pp. 77-78). Mithila art is also known as *madhubani* art. The only materials used to create this art at first were the freshly plastered mud walls and flooring of huts. But, they are now also produced on cloth, canvas, and handmade paper (<https://www.dsourc.in> › resource › rangoli › aripan).

*Aripana* is also known as *Alpana* in Mithila region and culture (Bimal, 2070, p.30). It is a type of *Rangoli* that is performed in Bihar. It makes reference to the practice of applying cow dung and clay on the ground to clean it. The Gods were begged to make the land suited for cultivation fertile and fruitful by offering a sacrifice in the form of the *Aripan* patterns as a request to them. But it is now a part of many daily ceremonies and rituals. *Aripan* is drawn,



both for adornment and purification.

#### 4.2 History and Practices in Mithila Culture

Painting's history precedes that of other art forms because it is the source of all other sculpture. Archaeological findings discovered from the different prehistoric caves of France, Spain and elsewhere suggested that the people of prehistoric culture were skilled to create beautiful and wonderful art specimens as the form of paintings (Dulal, 2019, p. 554). Anthropologists considered the artistic appeal is one of the four basic social activities of human life, are appeared in the dim past, hundreds of thousands years back that have been classified in a number of groups like visual art, oral literature, music, dance etc. The visual art is the oldest as well as a tangible form which includes drawing, painting, carving, engraving, sculpturing etc. (Roy, 2005, p. 512). In this respect Burkitt (1992, p. 237) state that:

when excavating an upper Paleolithic home site in the mouth of a cave or rock-shelter, one frequently comes across bone tools, portions of which have been carved into the shapes of animals heads or have had their surface covered with engravings of animals or signs or patterns: often too there are fragments of bone or suitable pieces of stone that are similarly engraved. It is safe to say that there is no one person in a thousand in this country today who would be capable even after some drawing lessons of emulating the works of art that were made by these old folk so many thousands of years ago.

The birth of painting began along with the primitive people who ate raw meat, used stone weapons and tools and walked naked (Amatya, 1999, p. 195). The first discovery of primitive was made in 1879 from a large cave Altamira of Spain. It was drawing cum painting found on the ceiling of the cave (Roy, 2005, p. 512). In Nepal, some inscriptional records suggest that painting was existed from the *Lichchhavi* period (Vajracharya, 2030, p. 1, 526).

In Mithila region during the age of the *Brahmanas* and Upanishad, the priority was given to sensual pleasure then encourages creating of art (Thakur, 1956, pp. 92-93). However, at the time of *Rajsuya Yajnas* 'fire altars' were made with bricks and stone blocks, copper and iron were used in them (Kumaraswamy, pp. 63-64; in Pandey, 2008, p. 175). Similarly, at the time of King *Janak* there was a beautiful palace decorated by the several types of pictures with drawings and paintings. These events and descriptions indicate that there was an existence of art as the form of painting during the period. While they conducted fire sacrifice rituals, for the first they were marked the outlines on the floor through drawing i.e. *Rekhi* in Sanskrit where *Yajna* was occurred. Obviously, that drawing or *rekhi* might be the proto types of *Aripana* painting of the period. In this regard Pandey (2008, p. 175) mentions that:

artistic activities started in Mithila after its inclusion in the Gupta dominion. By this time images had become a part and parcel of the Aryan society and Surya, Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti and Ganesh were widely worshiped in the temples. Before this, whatever images were made, were of wood and in the form of different kinds of paintings and they all became prey to the cruel march of time.

While Pala dynasty came into the power in eastern India during the early medieval period, the

artistic activities had also rapidly grown in the Mithila region. During this period there were several images of gods, goddesses, man and animals and other secular objects have been sculptured by the artists in the territories of *Simraunagarh*, *Valmikinagar*, *Janakpur* and *Murtiya*. The findings show that during the period between tenth to fourteenth centuries there were much artistic activities had been done in the kingdom of Mithila, ultimately which caused to origin of Mithila School of Art as a separate center of art which was characterized by high technical accomplishments and kind of mechanical grace and elegance.

The discoveries of art heritage suggest that the artists of Mithila not only concentrate their artistic appeal and in-depth skill of art only the sculpturing art, but also toward the creation of beautiful paintings as well. They had have high skill and knowledge of paintings and drawings on the wall and the courtyards of their houses and other buildings. The painting and drawing that is depicted on the wall is called *Kohbar* whereas the flooring design is known as the *Aripana* Art in Mithila region and culture.

As the form of *Kohbar*, the Mithila painting was continuously existed and practiced in Mithila region before the migration of Aryan people and culture here in this region (Bimal, 2070, p. 29). Therefore, the history of the art of painting is seems old as the existence of Aryan culture in the region. As the form of painting, *Aripana* is believed more popular comparatively then the *Kohbar* Art. Therefore, the art of painting of Mithila is represented by the famous *Aripana* Art which has been created from the time immemorial. First reference to this art is found in the *Brahma Puran*, which was written in the Gupta period (Pandey, 2008, p. 178). In this respect Rana (2021, p. 77) highlights that:

The land and people of North of the river Ganges, in the state of Bihar lies a land called Mithila, shaded by old mango groves and watered by the rivers from the Himalayas of Nepal. The art of *Aripana* or floor-painting, handed down from generation to generation, is the way of life in Mithila. There is not a single house in Mithila in which ceremonies are held without *Aripana*.

### 4.3 Using Methods and Materials



Sources: [mithilachitrakala.wordpress.com](https://mithilachitrakala.wordpress.com)

This piece of art is a token of thanks to the goddess of the ground. Also, the women use red powder in specific places to further adorn their creations, which enhances the final *Aripan*. Certain raw elements that are readily available locally are used to produce colors in addition to the *pithar*. Vermillion, local red clay, turmeric, flower petals for yellow, leaves for green, soot for black, and crushed berries for blue are used to embellish the *aripanas*. Whether it be a puja, a *vrata* (fast), or *samskaras* like *mundan* (tonsuring ceremony), *vivah* (marriage), *yajnopavita* (thread ceremony), etc., every significant function in Bihar has an *aripana* pattern. The *aripana* Mithila art form originated in the village of *Madhubani* in the Mithila area of Bihar. The art's beginnings are obscured by mystery. According to legend, the wedding hall was prepared for *Sita*, the daughter of King *Janak* of Mithila, to marry Lord Rama during the epic era, which is when it is usually accepted that the sculpture was made. The *Ramcharitamanas* by *Tulsidas* contains various in-depth descriptions of these wall and floor murals (<https://www.dsource.in> › resource › rangoli › aripan).

The tiny designs on the *Aripanas* are made with rapid fingertips rather than brushes. An *Aripan* is created with a *pithar*, a rice-powder and water mixture. Unbroken rice, or *achhyata*, is needed for *pithar*. Unbroken rice, or *achhyata*, is said to stand in for the god *Parabrahma*, the nectar *amritatatwa*, and *Akhandatatwa*, a crucial component of Mithila culture (Bimal, 2070, p. 30). The women dip two fingers into the *pithar* and move them with grace and delicacy to make beautiful geometric patterns on the mud floor of their homes and courtyards. These patterns also integrate different design elements (<https://www.dsource.in> › resource › rangoli › aripan). In this respect (Rana (2021, p. 76) mentions that:

The formation of *Aripana* is to smear and decorate the ground. *Pithar*, moistened white rice paste, made with the help of water and *sindur*, red vermilion are used to make *Aripana*. *Aripanas* are drawn on the floor using one or two fingers of the right hand dipping into *pithar* and with the dot or dots of *sindur* along with white, red, green, yellow and black colors. It has combinations and elaborations of symmetrical, floral, and geometrical designs measuring from six or eight feet across.

Red, black, yellow, blue or indigo, green and white colours have been used by the ladies to portray the themes and beautiful paintings of different objects and motifs. On the eve of a ceremony, the *Aripan* symbols are adorned on the front threshold of the house as well as several other areas inside the house. Without this prehistoric ground ornament, no event or rite would be complete. Ladies of all ages engage in the practice of this particular art form. It is drawn so that it might be worshiped. The *aripana* artwork, which is simple and geometric in character, is based on the most elaborate depiction of the eighteen hands of the Goddess *Durga*, the Goddess of strength. The Hindu religion of *tantra* has a relationship with geometrical lines.

#### 4.4 Types and Typologies

*Astadala*, *Kusumpasar*, *Chaunsankha*, *Chaupada*, *Purinpata*, *Dwipada* and so on are the major and popular illustrations of beautiful and amazing *Aripanas* which can be observed in the Mithila culture (Bimal, 2070, p.30). Hence, there are many kinds of *Aripana*, which are drawn in every day and for various occasions. Generally, they are categorized into two different folds such as every day drawing *Aripana* and special occasion's *Aripanas*. Every day drawing *Aripanas* are painted and drew into the court yards of the houses whereas special occasions *Aripanas* are drawn on the auspicious days such as *Makar Sankranti*, *Falgun Sankranti*, *Sasthi pooja*, *Gatra-Sankranti*, *Kojagara purnima*, *Diwali Pooja*, *Shrawanpanchami* and the rituals performing different sacraments. The special occasion's *Aripanas* are categorized as follow:

*Tusari Pooja Aripana*: Young, single Maithili women organize it between Makar and Falgun Sankranti in the hopes of meeting good spouses. Basically, these types of *Aripanas* are drawn as the forms of temples, the moon, sun, and *navagrah* i.e. nine planets.

*Sanjha Aripan*: it is depicted in honor of Sandhya Devi, the goddess of the evening. *Sasthi pooja Aripana*: These types of *Aripana* paintings are painted when young girls attain puberty.

The *Gatra-Sankrant Aripan*: It is the symbol of birth and death. The *Kojagara Aripana*: it is drawn on the leaf of *Makhan* on the full moon-day of *Aswin* i.e. in September. *Diwali Aripana*: it is also known as the *Sukha-ratri Aripana* in the Mithila region, is depicted to welcome to the Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. *Swastik Aripana*: it is drawn for blessing the younger generation (<https://www.dsource.in> › resource › rangoli › aripan).

Beside it, *Devathan Ekadashi Aripana*, *Tusari brata Aripana* and *Madhu Shrawani Aripana* are also known as the significant *Aripanas* paintings through the rituals, sacraments and other socio-cultural and religious perspectives in Mithila region. *Devathan Ekadashi Aripana* is drawn for the purpose of waking up to the gods and goddesses on the occasion of *Haribodhani Ekadashi*. *Tusari brata Aripana* is drawn in the courtyard early in the morning before the rising of the sun on the day of *Pausa Sankranti* i.e. the last day of the month of *Pausa* for the purpose of finding the best bridegroom. *Madhu Shrawani Aripana* is drawn on the auspicious night of

*Srawan Panchami* into the *Kohabar* i.e. worshipping room of the house (Bimal, 2070, pp. 21-30).

#### 4.5 Objects and Motifs



Sources: #kosa #rangoli #madhubanipainting

Basically, the gods and goddesses and other secular motifs such as *Durga*, *Kali*, *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, *Parwati*, *Ram*, *Sita*, *Laxman*, *Radha*, *Rukmani*, *Krishna*, *Yasodha*, *Ganesh*, *Hanuman*, sun, moon, bamboo, trees, lotus flowers, parrot, peacock, fishes are painted through using different matching pigments in the *Aripana* paintings. Similarly, different shape and size of geometric points and drawing are also drawn in the art form of *Aripana*. Obviously, the painted reliefs are recognized as the highly auspicious and symbolic character.

There are several pictures and drawings depicted in *Aripana* painting. The most popular and significant designs used in *Aripanas* are the pictures of gods and goddesses and religious and secular motifs. The designs or motifs used in *Aripan* can be divided into the following five categories: representations of people, animals, and birds; representations of flowers (such as the lotus), leaves, and fruit; tantric symbols, such as *yantras* and *bindu* dots; representations of Gods and Goddesses; and representations of objects, such as lamps, swastikas, mountains, and rivers.

#### 4.6 Tantric Influence in Aripana Painting



Sources: <https://mithiladharohar.blogspot.com/2017/08/mithila-lok-chitrakala-Aripan.html>

The central theme of tantric philosophy is the creative mystery that motivates us to direct our acts toward inner knowledge. Tantra holds that achieving greater awareness involves accepting and attaching to the physical world as well as renunciation and detachment, according to the theory. Tantra unifies spirit and matter, allowing people to reach their full potential on both a physical and spiritual level (Rana, 2021, p. 78). Tantra has overcome the conflict that develops between the physical world and its inner reality because, in the eyes of a *tantrika*, the spiritual is not in rivalry with the organic but rather its completion (Ajit and Madhu, 9; In Rana, 2021). In this regard Rana (2021, p. 78) further emphasis that:

*tantra* does not see the outer and inner world as two different realities, but two inseparable parts of the one world. Tantra, a Sanskrit word, is formed from the root *tan*-that means to expand. Tantra lays emphasis on the expansion of one's inner consciousness through the understanding of the functioning of the world, and thereby realizing his or her inherent spiritual powers.

The word 'Tantra' itself derives from a body of religious literature called the Agamas. Shiva and

Shakti, the divine masculine and feminine, frequently converse in these, with Shiva denoting consciousness and awareness and Shakti denoting energy or strength (Solluna, 2017, p. 12 & 70). He argues that *tantra's* emphasis on kinship over separation enables people to move from the material world of family life to the spiritual. According to this, it is asserted that Tantra is not a religion nor a mysticism but rather an empirical-experimental technique that has become

ingrained as a cultural pattern that is relevant to everyone and is not limited to any specific sect or group (Ajit and Madhu, 13; In Rana, 2021). It suggests that *tantra* is factual and experimental rather than mystical or sacred. Any social animal practices this cultural pattern, which is a socioeconomic way of life. In this respect Timalsina (2015, p. 2) further says:

the most salient features of Tantric discourse include the concept that the world is directly linked with the Human body and that both are composed of the same cosmic energy. If this connection is recognized, so the texts claim the Human body and mind can interact with and affect the course of cosmic events.

Timilsina refers to the connection between the body, mind, and cosmic energy in tantric discourse, which implies a shift from materiality to spirituality. A number of *yantras* that were shown during the floor painting serve as additional evidence for the connection to *tantra*. 'Maha Kali' and 'shriyantra' pictures each include a certain type of *Aripana*. These *yantras* are used in *Aripanas* and are associated with the worship of Shakti. This demonstrates the agency of women in *tantra*. As a result, in order to symbolize Hindu culture, *Aripanas* are portrayed with ceremonial, security, and fertility motifs. Thus, *tantra* advocates for the perfect or full experience of the whole, the individual's realization and union with what Madhu and Ajit refer to as the 'cosmic consciousness as Purusha, a male principle' and the 'cosmic force of nature as Prakriti, a female principle' in addition to giving the phenomenal world equal standing (Ajit and Madhu, 15; In Rana, 2021). The striking example of *tantra*'s promotion of spirituality via material existence is *Aripana* in Mithila.

#### 4.7 Folk Artists and Craftsmanship



Sources: [https://www.creativemithila.com/creativemithila\\_marriage\\_aripan](https://www.creativemithila.com/creativemithila_marriage_aripan)

Upendra Thakur is of the opinion that *Aripana* paintings of Mithila are mostly the wall paintings of archer style, nurtured by the Brahmins and *Kayasthas* of the region. The Brahmin paintings bear thin wavering and nervous lines, whereas the *Kayasthas* paintings

show firm, vigorous and precise lines. The form is agile and vital and the motion delicate and fantastic (Pandey, 2008, p. 178). In this respect Aran (1978, pp. 83-84) remarked the *Aripana* paintings of Mithila as following ways:

for several thousand years now, the women of Mithila have cultivated the ceremonial art of drawing and painting on the mud walls of their houses, the floors of their courtyards, and later, the paper as a form of worship, an instrument of ritual, and a means of communication with gods and men.

Women in Mithila have a lot of room to exercise their magnificent presence in the social sphere, despite the fact that it is a patriarchal society. While it is true that men have more freedom of movement and other socioeconomic advantages, this does not imply that women are less valuable or exclusively seen as objects of patriarchal patterns. Women enjoyed equal status, and occasionally even higher status than men, because tantrism has a significant impact on the Mithila way of life. Regarding the tantric view of feminine subjectivity, Biernacki (2007, p. 62) states:

One finds everywhere the tantric saying that the god Shiva- who usually is conceived as supreme spirit, is actually a mere *sava* i.e. corpse, a dead body, mere matter, without the feminine i.e. *shakti* principle. The male god is the dead body while the female is the enlivening spirit. Ichnographically, this appears in the well-known image of the goddess Kali astride the corpse Shiva.

Women, who have been treated as objects by patriarchy, are actually spirits. Without women, even Shiva, the highest Hindu god, would be a lifeless corpse. Women are the source of life. This recognizes the importance of women in a patriarchal culture and establishes their subjectivity. On the auspicious occasion of *Tusari* Puja, young *Maithil* females who are single paint *Aripanas* in an effort to find nice spouses. They depict a temple, the moon, the sun, and the

*Navagrah*, or nine planets, on this occasion (Rana, 2021, pp. 80-81).

The women of Mithila are skilled at creating designs using circles as well. The majority of their work is still done under pseudonyms. Only a minority of the mostly illiterate women who create the artwork identify the paintings with their own names. They are hesitant to think of themselves as independent artists. William and Mildred Archer were among the earliest non-Indians to record the history of *Madhubani* painting. During the colonial era, the district was home to Mr. Archer, a British official servant. The woman painters were using some sketches on paper as memory aids when the Archers took possession of them.



#### 4.8 Symbols and Significance



A traditional Aripan, Sources: <https://www.dsource.in/resource/rangoli/types-rangolis/aripan>

Due to women dominating the art of *aripana* without receiving any formal instruction, female principle is dominant while gods like Vishnu or Shiva continue to be subordinate. *Aripana* has a connection to *tantra*, and the triangle there represents the three ideas of desire, knowledge, and action. With these ideas, the female forces of desire, as represented by goddess *Laxmi*, wisdom, as represented by goddess *Saraswoti*, and action, as represented by goddess *Durga's* daring, come into play. Specifically, *Durga* as embodied by *Parbati* stands for the acceptance of sexuality, fertility, and natural powers. In this respect Rana (2021, pp. 79-80) adds that:

The *Aripana* is filled with a detailed description of natural life forms and their connection with the religious and spiritual belief systems inherent in the Mithila region, and each image contributes significance to the meaning of the whole. The images drawn in *Aripanas* are life affirming and symbolize the underlying philosophy of the society. Mithila floor drawings are filled with the tantric images, Hindu gods and goddesses, and folk themes, and mythological characters and symbols. The Hindu religious practices tantric tradition in the region, and other local myths and themes are reflected in *Aripanas*.

Currently, *aripana* is the way of life for those who reside in the Mithila region. Since the origin of humanity, it serves a range of purposes from birth to funeral ceremonies. Regarding the symbolic meaning and the significance of *Aripana* art in Mithila culture, Pandey (2008, pp. 177-178) critically examines that:

*Aripana* is highly symbolic in character and there is deep influence of the cult of fertility in its. Moreover, the so-called '*Aripana*' i.e. a magic circle is representing a magically purified space for rituals and domestic religious ceremonies that is equivalent of Tibetan Mandalas. Like the latter, it also represents the cosmos and the

symbols use in these drawings express the cosmological concept of *tantra* and scenes of Hindu mythology.

The majority of *Maithil Aripanas* emphasize the material, feminine side of life by highlighting the young *Maithil* girls output, which is represented by the lotus. *Aripanas* represent opposition against patriarchal, *Brahmanical* society by denoting a way of life characterized by a conscious pleasure of sensual and sexual experiences as fitting vehicles for the realization of the primal reality or power. As a result, it is also ritual. In this circumstance Rana (2021, p. 77) further says:

*Aripana* patterns are a part of each and every auspicious ceremony in Mithila, be it a puja, a *vrata* i.e. fast or a *samskaras* like *mundan*, *vivah*, *yajnopavita* etc. On the eve of a ceremony, *Aripana* designs are prepared in the courtyard, in front of the door and a number of other places. Any ceremony or ritual is considered incomplete without this traditional art form adorning the ground. Initially, *Aripana* designs were drawn in order to make the cultivated land fertile and fruitful by magical performances. However, today it has become a part of numerous ceremonies and rituals.

Each object in the image has a distinct significance because they all transmit a variety of meanings within the context of Mithila civilization. Throughout the dawn of time, *Aripana* has been passed down from one generation to the next with fertility and wealth as its core themes. Through the article Rana (2021, pp. 74-75) demonstrates and examines the significance of *Aripana* as following:

its usefulness, and connection to *tantra*. *Aripana* seems to have been portrayed to educate women about the deeper understanding of the meanings of human life through the union between the spirit and matter in Mithila region. *Aripana* has been traditionally drawn in different occasion of life from birth to death in the Maithili culture to show dominant women agency by worshipping *sakti*, a spirit or the enlivening energy inevitable for the functioning of the world. The drawings on the floor portray the symbolic images such as lotus flower, *yantras*, temples, dots, lines, etc. These images represent fertility and propagation of life.

Due to the influence of tantric philosophy, this art gives equal weight to the external and inward realities. By utilizing a variety of shapes, colors, geometric patterns, and symbols, the paintings enable both the creators and the audience to comprehend cosmic consciousness and bridge the gap between the material and spiritual worlds. As a result, the paper showcases the distinctive Vedic culture's tantric-influenced floor drawing tradition. In this respect as the symbolic meaning and significance of *Aripana* paintings of Mithila, Aran (1978, pp. 83-84) remarked that:

The paintings are full of tantric symbols and representative of tantric concept of life. whether abstract or figurative, the drawings and paintings are permeated by useful-conscious sexuality, and the original ceremonial use of the painting centered around marriage, fertility and the typical tantric concept of *Bhoga*, the sensual pleasure, serving the purpose of attainment of intuitive wisdom, and *Lila*, a play a game and a

passing illusion.

Obviously, afore mentioned discussion regarding the symbolic meaning and significance of *Aripanas*, reveals that it is a symbol of security and fertility among the people of Mithila society and culture. The *Aripana* painting's intended meaning is intimately tied to the rites, security, and fertility of the material world. Either directly or indirectly, it acts as a vital tool for achieving spiritual fulfillment for people. All of the images of the symbols of life that are depicted in works of art that deal with the themes of fertility and regeneration emphasize the significance of material reality and the possibility that by indulging in physical pleasure, humans can become one with cosmic consciousness.

## 5. Conclusion

Mithila was known as *Videha* kingdom in ancient period. For the first time *Satapatha Brahman* mentioned about the Mithila region. The Kingdom of Mithila extended in the past from Himalayas in the north to Ganges on the south and between the *Koshi* and *Gandaki* rivers. In Mithila region art was not encouraged in the age of the *Brahmanas* and in the Upanishadic period whereas later on, gradually artistic feeling came into existence and plenty of religious and secular art specimens were created in this region. In Mithila region along with the other forms of art, the *Aripana*, a flower drawing, drew everyday and some time on any occasion as well as a separate form of art. There has always been a cultural transition from one generation to the next.

It is now a way of life for the women of Mithila.

*Aripanas* usually comprise of line drawings, illustrated on the floor of the house in the Mithila region. The word *Aripana* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Alepan* which means to smear. The so-called 'Aripana' or magic circle, symbolizes a place that has been miraculously cleansed for rituals and domestic religious observances. It should be comparable to the Tibetan Mandala Art, Bengali *Mehandi* or *Nandana* Art, *Gujarati* Sathia Art, *Maharashtra* Rangoli Art, and Rangoli Art of Bengal. Whatsoever, *Aripana* art is the multi-facets cultural heritage in Mithila region, but lacking of adequate study and research several aspects such as appropriate meaning, history and tradition, symbols and significance, causes of creating, using methods and materials, value as an intangible cultural heritage are still in under research. Therefore, through the paper the researchers hope to minimal bridging to address afore mentioned issues.

It can be concluded that very few people liked *Madhubani* painting on *tasar* silk sari and shawl whereas, majority of the peoples preferred the ritualistic and village life motifs. Combined designs by *Kachni* and *Bharni* technique were highly preferred. Nearly, minorities observed that colourful designs were more attractive. Today's consumer fascinated by the exquisite hand embroidered and hand painted designer apparel. *Taasar* being natural fabric has a great demand in foreign country especially in USA and Europe. If it is enriched with hand painting, the demand will increase many fold.

In this work, the researchers have limited their contributions within the issues such as the concept, history and tradition, using methods and materials, types and typology, objects and motifs, tantric influence, folk artists and craftsmanship and symbolic meaning and

significance of *Aripana* Art of Mithila culture in Nepal. There are still remaining several issues such as socio-economic, philosophical values, as an intangible cultural heritage and tourism product, academic and religious aspects to be studied regarding this folk art. Therefore, for generating appropriate knowledge of *Aripana* Art of Mithila culture in Nepal, there most to be conducted plenty of researches towards the remaining afore mentioned gray field.

## 6. Implication

Mithila paintings mostly depict people and their association with nature and scenes and deities from the ancient epics. Natural objects like the sun, the moon, and religious plants like tulsi are also widely painted, along with scenes from the royal court and social events like wedding's. Done in primary colors of natural origin on paper and clothe, the Mithila Art narrates mythological and religious events. The painting is done with fingers, twigs, brushes, nib pens, and matchsticks, using natural dyes, and pigments and is characterized by eye-catching geometrical patterns.

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