

Artistic Traditions and Cultural Expressions in Medieval Mithila

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Abstract

Ancient Mithila was a very creative part of Eastern India with an art and culture that was reflective of their religion and community-oriented way of life. The art developed in Mithila over hundreds of years (1100s to 1700s) was influenced by the way men and women painted and made things (painted paintings or walls) and passed those paintings or objects forward over time; established by storytelling, painting (Madhubani or Mithila), and community living based on the stories of The Gods Rama and Krishna. The artistic development of Mithila was largely due to Maithili author Vidyapati, as his compositions of poetry helped create the Bhakti movement. This artistic creativity was also expressed through the art in homes and ceremonies performed by women; wall and floor painting had a larger purpose than just ornamental - they represented community identity, history, and other important stories of gods and goddesses - for future generations. The research indicates that the artistic expression of medieval Mithila was not an isolated occurrence, but rather a part of the daily practice of people in the community and their spiritual beliefs, and thus provides a deeper context of the culture of the region. While the creativity that was expressed in medieval Mithila is usually overlooked - were far more significant than being decorative or as part of ritual; expressed a larger meaning than the act of creating a product or participating in a ritual.

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Introduction

Mithilā had two important cultural foundation components - festivals/religious occasions and the artistic/aesthetic expression by the people living within the borders of this civilization. The people who participated in an extensive ceremonial calendar also created masterpieces of architectural works; sculptures; paintings; music and performing arts. Each of Mithilā's artistic expressions were interrelated through religious rituals, social customs and the daily activities of the community. The temples, sculptures and paintings demonstrate the pursuit of enlightenment, while music, dance and drama provide entertainment and facilitate cultural transmission. By examining these various forms of Mithilā art, this research paper explores how they have developed; their original characteristics; and how different cultures mixed together through time causing change in culture during the medieval period (Chaudhary, n.d.).

Artistic Traditions and Cultural Expressions in Medieval Mithila

Mithilā in the middle Ages was a centre for achievement through artistic customs with architecture. Sources from people who were living and writing at the time speak about both large royal palaces and small huts, demonstrating that there was a wide variety of different types of buildings in the era. The remains of broken and decayed buildings and broken and decayed objects now found at many places within Mithilā provide archaeological evidence of advanced architecture and artistic expression existed there during this period. Both Dharmasvāmī and Vidyāpati express their surprise at how beautiful the palaces of the kings were, while there are many references to the existence of these types of buildings in contemporary Smṛtikāras. Vidyāpati's Kīrtilatā depicts both vividly the royal palace and gives insight into the architectural style used in his time. The architectural terms used by Vidyāpati need to be brought to attention as well: (i) Kṛī

āsaila, (ii) Dhār āgrha, (iii) Pramadavana, (iv) Puṣpavāṭikā, (v) Yantra vyajana, (vi) Sṛṅgārasaṅketa, (vii) Mādh avimaṇita (viii) Khaṭvā hindola, (ix) Kusumasajjā, (x) Catuḥ Sampallava, and (xi) Citraśālī, etc. It can be clearly seen that until Vidyāpati's time, the ancient traditions of architectural style had not changed significantly at all. Vidyāpati acknowledges the contributions made by Muslims, particularly those from Jaunpur (Chaudhary, n.d.; Vidyapati, n.d.; Jyotirishvara, n.d.).

Vidyāpati denotes (i) Khāsadarbār (Audience Chamber-Cf. Bhuktāsthāna maṇ apa),

(ii) Darasadara (the grand gatehouse-Cf. Rājavāra), (iii) Nimājagrha (Royal chapel-Cf. Devagrha), (iv) Khvāgrha (-Āhāramaṇ apa) and Śoramagrha (=Sukhamandira). The Sharquis of Jaunpur appear to have significantly relied on ancient Indian traditions about architectural concepts. The Varṇa Ratnākara provides a comprehensive description of the palace and the temples. The ongoing interactions resulted in a notable synthesis.

The narrative of the royal court in Varṇa Ratnākara is really intriguing. Sthāna means a noted place and is derived from the Persian astān (also 'threshold' or 'the house of a Pir'). The Muslim architecture of Jaunpur was an amalgamation of Indian and Islamic elements, and this blend later led to the creation of a new Indian style in many areas. Local styles of architecture were particularly evident at Jaunpur. This architectural style also shows a great deal of influence from Hindu design as seen through the following characteristics: sloping walls; square or rectangular pillars; small galleried verandahs or passages; and, no standard minaret. Here, Hindu and Muslim architectural elements converge to create a novel architectural style. The denizens of Mithilā excelled at temple architecture. Spooner has performed an exhaustive examination of these temples, categorizing them as "Tirhut types of Temples." Spooner refutes Fergusson's claim by classifying northern varieties as 'Tirhut types,' which consist of a cella, tower, and porch. A collection of temples, epitomizing the zenith of temple construction, illustrates the progression of this form. The literary notion of the Varṇa Ratnākara regarding the intricately carved stone base with embellishments can be inferred from the scant remnants of the Karṇāta palaces, currently located in Nepal (Chaudhary, n.d., p. 360; Spooner, n.d.; Spooner, n.d., p. 126). You may still see the ruins of old palaces and temples in places like Uchchaitha, Birpur (Begusarai), Bahera, Bhagirathpur, Andhrāthārhi, and Bheet Bhagwānpur. From an aesthetic standpoint, neither the Tilkeśvara temple in Darbhāṅgā nor the Sun temple in Kandāhā, Saharsha, have been investigated. The outstanding architectural qualities are exhibited by these two ancient Mithilā temples. The recent discovery of the remains of a complete temple at Bahera indicates that the architects adhered to established guidelines and procedures. The Bahera and Bhagirathapur findings provide insight into architectural progress. The presence of ornamental and decorated bricks (a rare variety at Bahera), along with exquisite stone slabs and door frames, indicates that this craftsmanship was not overlooked in our region. Some of the Bhagirathpur bricks may represent exquisite examples of tantric cakras, according to the theory. Extensive hall designs, symmetrical entrances, quadrangles, and stairs, and the painters' use of geometric patterns are all on display in the temple's lengthy hallways. In terms of building forts, Mithilā was not lacking. The construction of a strong stronghold is shown by the Maheśvarā inscription (A.D. 1291). The fort of Simaraongarh was described in great detail by Dharmasvāmī

before this. The statements made by Ferishta, Barni, and Mulla Taqia that the capital of Mithilā was surrounded by strong defenses are supported by their evidence. Our claim that the Mithilā residents were skilled in this architectural style is supported by the presence of multiple garhs or forts in the city. The ancient forts of Mithilā can be found in many different regions (Spooner, n.d., pp. 121–134; *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, n.d.; Chaudhary, n.d., p. 360).

Sculpture

The sculpture in Mithilā was equally significant. The sculptures discovered in Mithilā can be categorized into the following groups: Viṣṇu – exemplifying the tradition of Vaiṣṇavism. Śiva - Illustrating the worship of Śaivism. Śakti - Illustrating the doctrine of Śāktism.

The limited photographs observed thus far at Simaraongarh exhibit notable sculptural superiority. Images of nearly all prominent deities are available and hold significant artistic value. Numerous Viṣṇu images, representing several incarnations, have been discovered in different regions of Mithilā. In addition to several sculptures of Buddha and Tāra, representations of Gaṇeśa, Sūrya, Brahmā, Gaṅgā, and Yamunā are also present. The findings of the Sūrya image from various locations and the necessity of the ancient sun temple at Kandahā (Saharsa), accompanied with an inscription dated Śāka 1357 (i.e., 1435 A.D.) from the era of the Oinavāra monarch Narasimhadeva, substantiate the prevalence of the Sun religion in Mithilā (Chaudhary, n.d.; *JBRS*, n.d., p. 347; Chaudhary, n.d., p. 362). In Mithilā, the sculpture is rather more substantial than that of Bengal. Numerous early depictions of Sūrya exist, accompanied by Daṇ a Śiva as Umā Maheśvara, Viṣṇu flanked by personified weapons, the Buddha, Avalokiteśvara, Tāra, Gaṇeśa, and other deities, frequently inscribed, occasionally noting the sculpture's donation and more commonly reflecting the Buddhist doctrine, which holds significant value for the study of early sculpture from Mithilā.

In subsequent periods, the weapons of Viṣṇu are no longer personified, the delicate and translucent top clothing is represented by wavy lines, the crown grows increasingly elaborate, and the figure's autonomy becomes more ethereal. The exquisite representations of the Gaṅgā and Yamunā from Andhrāthāri (Madhubani) are superior examples. The principal examples of Mithilā sculpture are religious icons (Chaudhary, n.d.; Chaudhary, n.d.; Mishra, n.d., p. 253). They exhibit a classical nobility and composure in their demeanor. In the 10th and 12th centuries, a slim form became preferred. The overarching perspective of the 10th century becomes increasingly limited, while the refinement of the physiognomic structure becomes ever more apparent. The legs become rigid and exhibited a lack of suppleness. In the 12th century, the slim physique and the formal approach of the early century remain preserved. The sensitivity of facial expressions that characterized the previous century has vanished, and adornments are excessively extravagant (*JBORS*, n.d., p. 151; Mishra, n.d., p. 254; Mishra, n.d.). Since the era of Nānyadeva, the artistry of this region has gained significance, as evidenced by the ruins and sites of Simaraon, Hāvidha, etc. Dharmasvāmī has an image of Tārā at Vaiśālī supported by an inscription noting its presence in a region of Bihar that has a long history as a site for producing sculptures. The elegant balance of sculpture created by Pāla and Sena was indicative of the richness of one of the periods that shaped India during its history. These sculptures exhibited both the large-scale (monumental) and calming (tranquil)

aspects of a delicate and enjoyable physical beauty as well as the versatility of human emotion (beyond their historical connection to these two traditions) through the fusion of these concepts into an impressive synthesis. A similar yet distinct type of spiritual discipline in Mithilā associated with the emergence of Tantricism created a distinct separation between erotic interruption and spiritual ecstasy (Mishra, n.d., p. 255; Mishra, n.d., pp. 255–256; Chaudhary, n.d., p. 363). The great impact of the Tantric ritualism on the Hindus of India (Middle Ages) fused transcendental [spiritual] ideals with materialism, producing one of the most sophisticated examples of humanism and spirituality. The evolution of the representation (of the deity) had received a new perspective. Previously both hands of a deity were depicted in a single form; but now a single deity is often depicted using many hands. In his *Durgābhakti tarāṅginī*, Vidyāpati provides an extensive treatment of the following topics: (i) Pūjāgrhanirmāṇa, (ii) Pratimāniveśa; and (iii) Pratimālākṣṇa, in addition to numerous other topics. The Pālas infused local character into the sculptural and architectural art of Bihar, a practice subsequently upheld by the following kings of Mithilā. The incidental findings from other regions of north Bihar corroborate this, indicating that Mithilā, in her modest manner, contributed to the advancement of sculptural excellence during the examined time.

Artistic Representation in Painting

Painting serves as a significant medium for the expression of emotions and sentiments. The essence of a culture and its surroundings dictates the prevailing trend in painting. Throughout the examined time, painting as an artistic medium was prominent in Mithilā. In addition to the better recognized and widespread forms, Mithilā made two notable additions to painting: (i) Aipana (Alpanā or Aripaṇa) and (ii) Kohabara. The discipline of painting can be categorized into two primary groups: Bhittīcitra (wall painting) and Bhūmicitra (floor painting). The Aipana is categorized among this second group of paintings. It is a significant form of folk art. It is easy to compare this art form to "Sathia" from Gujarat, "Rangoli" from Maharashtra, "Alpana" from Bengal, and "Mehndi"/"nandana" from Rajasthan. On most occasions, the women of Mithilā decorate their courtyards, doorways, and many more areas, by creating auspicious drawings. To do this, they make circular designs with a white material that is created from ground rice powder. Numerous Aipana designs feature depictions of Śiva-Pārvaṭī, Viṣṇu-Lakṣmī, and other deities, rendered with exceptional uniqueness and creativity in diverse colors. Aipana exemplifies the prominence of the Śakti worship in Mithilā. References to Aipana can be found even in earlier texts such as the *Purāṇas* and *Harṣacarita* (Roerich, 1959, pp. 58–59; Chaudhary, n.d., p. 363; Vidyapati, n.d.).

The traditional folk art of Mithilā takes the form of the conventional folk art of Tantrika designs. Influenced heavily by the Aipana (the eight-petal lotus design) associated with the goddess Durgā—who appears as a figure on eight petals during ceremonial rites, including conch, disc, lotus flower, sword, shield, mace and rope—Mithilā's culture/folk art continues to thrive in this area. Another form of the traditional art of Mithilā that has been preserved throughout the generations is Kohabara, as expressed in the poetry of Vidyāpati. Kohabara is the artwork created on the walls of the home of newlyweds who first meet after marriage. To house this function, either a separate house is built to accommodate newlyweds or a specific room within the existing home is

allotted to newlyweds for their meeting, and the walls in this room must feature mobile depictions and text from folklore/mythology as well as examples of ideas represented through various colours. The medium for these works is Gairika (a red-tinted mineral) that signifies good luck. Women come together for this event to sing and play music. Vidyāpati is also associated with the art of painting (even though there were two artists known as Śaśī and Mūladeva). Mūladeva was a highly skilled painter who painted a scene that depicted two deer on one side and a portrait of himself with the princess on the other side of the same painting. Mūladeva was able to use his artistic ability to achieve the goal of his heart through the act of creating a painting. W.G. Archer referred to the wall paintings in Mithilā as being known as Maithila Paintings (he did not create this name). The act of painting is found not just on walls but also on pottery, fans, plates, paper, and various practical or functional items. These paintings depict sensuality as a routinely used form of art in Mithilā and are a large part of the traditions of Mithilā. According to Archer, painting in maithilā is as important and as integral to life as sweeping the yard and getting water from the spring. The colours that are used include pink, yellow, green, blue, and red (Grierson, n.d.; Archer, n.d.); Thakur, 1982, p. 54). The content of the paintings can be classified into two categories: (i.) a collection of heavenly beings often found with more ordinary beings such as brides, grooms and the wedding party together. (ii.) a collection of animals. Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, Durgā, Kālī, Sītā, Rādhā, and various other deities are typically shown in paintings. In the wedding ceremony, painting is deemed vital, with prominent motifs including the sun, moon, bamboo, lotus, parrots, turtles, and fish. The art of Mithilā exhibits refinement, continuity, and a literary foundation characteristic of tribal art or the folk art of rural communities. Therefore, it was W.G. Archer, with his inquisitive perspective, was the first to highlight the mural paintings of the village communities in Mithilā.

The external world has become acquainted with this artwork from the villages of Rāntī and Jitvārapura in the Madhubani area, leading to these murals being commonly referred to as 'Madhubani Painting.' Indeed, the most suitable designation for this artistic movement would be Maithila Painting, as proposed by Archer. Madhubani Painting gained notoriety following the devastating famine that affected Mithilā in 1967-68. The terrain was severe, monochromatic, fissured, and barren, with relentless heat searing the ground. Driven by a fervent desire to assist the starving peasants, a woman from the west traversed the Madhubani villages. Amidst the pervasive gloom, she was quickly captivated by the 'vivid' figures adorning the mud walls of the huts. Enchanting and ethereal: the woman was informed that this was created by an uneducated beauty who, when persuaded by her, readily replicated it on a piece of paper. The woman transported the painting to her homeland (Jayakar, 1971; Thakur, 1982, p. 56; Thakur, 1982).

The painting occupied a prominent position in her drawing-room and, thus, after centuries of neglect due to insufficient support, the Madhubani Painting was 're-born' in 1967-68 A.D., achieving new heights via the tireless efforts of the late L.N. Miśra, the former Minister of Foreign Trade. The painters are women who have not attended any formal education in painting. What they were unable to do through an examination of the letters, they accomplish through these paintings. Every girl acquires this skill from her mother and close relatives at a young age. Mahā Sāvitrī Devī of Rāntī

village, Sīta Devī of Jitvārapura, Buā Devī Jhā, and Jagadambā Devī are renowned figures whose significant contributions to styles, techniques, and innovations in Madhubani paintings have garnered global acclaim for this art form. Maithila paintings differ from one hamlet to another. Despite the originality of the work, it is identifiable by its style and character. The multiple works demonstrate a mastery of the rural landscape where, across time and space, multiple events are depicted at the same time, but one event is depicted as being in motion while the other events are depicted as being static (Mithila Mihir, 1944; Mishra, n.d., p. 216; Jyotirishvara, n.d.). In Mithilā women are participating in painting from all communities; however, the works from the Brāhmaṇa and Kāyastha women have a distinct identity. The precise origins and antiquity of Madhubani Paintings are unclear; therefore, it is difficult to determine when this wall painting (Bhitti-citra) first occurred. Upendra Thākura asserts that the symbolic representations closely resemble the designs seen in Harappan pottery and the motifs on punch-marked coins. According to the narrative, even the women of King Janaka's household engaged in wall painting. According to tradition, when Lakṣmaṇa accompanied Rāma and Sītā to the forest, his wife Urmilā depicted his likeness on the wall and performed daily adoration of it. Upendra Thākura has shown that Madhubani painting originates from ancient periods, as referenced in the ancient literature of Mithilā. He asserts that the Mughal, Kāngrā, and Rājsthānī styles have had no effect on this painting, which is entirely a result of the vivid imagination of uneducated local women, showcasing remarkable rural vitality and freshness. Since ancient times, these murals have proliferated on the walls of mud huts and the floors of homes during ceremonial events (Chaudhary, n.d., p. 374; Lochan, n.d.; *Mithila Bharati*, 1977).

Music, dance, and theatrical performances, among others. Music was a favored leisure activity among the inhabitants of Mithilā during the examined era. The tradition of cultivating music as an art form in Mithilā is ancient and may be traced back to the Vedas. Music was a favored activity not only among the rulers of Mithilā but was also extensively embraced by all societal strata. Jyotirīshvara, in his Varṇa Ratnākara, alludes to the disciplines of music and dance. Vidyāpati was a renowned musician. Rāgataranginī or Locana (A.D. 1650-1725) offers a credible and engaging narrative of the history of the Mithilā School of music. The music of Mithilā was influenced by the renowned poet and musician, Amir Khusrau. A number of folk songs corroborate that music served as a prevalent form of recreation during the examined period. Mithilā appears to lack distinct Maithilā desi rāgas until referenced in Nanyadeva's significant book, Sarasvatīhrdayālam Kārahāra. This work is the most comprehensive commentary on Bharata Muni's Nāṭyaśāstra. He has provided a compilation of around 180 rāgas. Nanyadeva and his musician adherents significantly advanced music in Mithilā and likely promoted the utilization of the local vernacular and musical forms. Although Jaideva's Geet Govinda is not classified as a work of Mithilā, its significant influence on Mithilā music renders its relevance undeniable. King Harisimhadeva was a distinguished connoisseur of music, and in the Nṛityavidyākathā of Puruṇa Parīkṣā by Vidyāpati, a Mithilā musician asserts that only 'Hara' (Lord Shiva) or Harisimhadeva himself could evaluate his artistry. His court featured accomplished musicians, including Jyotirīshvara, who provided a detailed account of the musical practices in medieval Mithilā (Rakesh, n.d.; Abul Fazl, n.d., p. 262; Thakur, n.d., p. 383). In the sixth kallola of his work

Varṇa Ratnākara, he provides a detailed account of a bhāt, encompassing the roles of court bard, panegyrist, genealogy, and royal emissary. We observe that Vidyāwanta, a professional vocalist or music instructor, often referred to as a 'kalāwanta' in contemporary times, is depicted as having training that is hardly inferior to that of the highly esteemed 'bhāt'. Jyotirīshvara has referenced the names of rāgas, the śrūtis, as well as the seven categories of gāyana-doṣa, or defects of singers, and fourteen categories of gīta-doṣa, or defects in singing. The description of dancing is more intriguing than these. The qualifications of ten types of drums (drummer-types), twelve styles of drum music (drum-tune/melodic-types), and time-beats (tāla), ten rasas (rasa-types), thirty vyabhicāribhāvas (vyabhicāribhāva-types), and eight sāttvika feelings (sāttvika-types) has been documented below. The performer who performs as a pātra is considered to be an accomplished dancer. He is the performer who performs in thirty-two types of chari (chari-features) and thirty-two types of kulak (kulak-features). The performer who performs as a preraṇā is a male performer. This document delineates the different types of dance they do. Ultimately, there exists a compilation of twenty-seven varieties of lutes.

Upon King Harisimhadeva's relocation to Nepal, the epicenter of music likewise transitioned to that region. The subsequent centuries witnessed significant advancements in music by the Maithilas in Nepal. A writer named Simha-Bhūpāla supported music in Nepal. Bhūpāla may be equated with Bhūpasimha, referenced in Nepalese inscriptions as a Maithila sovereign succeeding Śaktisimha and Harisimha. He was contemporary King of Pratāprudra of the 14th century. His sole work is the Sangīta Ratnākara Vyākhyā, a dissertation on music (Mishra, n.d., p. 220; *JBORS*, n.d.; Mishra, n.d., p. 222).

Jagaddhara is another notable figure in the realm of music. He authored Sangītasarvasva. He authored remarks on Bhavabhūti's Mālatī Mādhava and additional theatrical works. The paramount work in the Mithilā School of music is Sri Hasta-Muktāvalī by Subhānkara. This is a distinctive essay on Mithilā music. Barua is alleged to have misidentified Subhānkara. Subhānkara was the progeny of Mahārāja Maheśa Thākura, who purportedly governed Mithilā from 1584 until 1619 A.D. Subhānkara is also recognized as the author of Sangīt Dāmodara.

Locana and Rāmdāsa discuss his enthusiasm for music and the arts. Locana provides a highly genuine depiction of the Mithilā School's music in his work Rāgataranginī (A.D. 1650-1725). He was considered as a prominent musician. He also felt he had identified new types of rāgas in other regions of the country. He characterized rāga Bhairava as the preeminent among all male rāgas. Jyotirīshvara in his Dhūrta samāgama, Vidyāpati in his Gorakṣavijaya, and Umāpati in his Pārijātaḥaraṇa have provided a catalog of musical rāgas that were prevalent in Mithilā. Nataraga, Malavaraga, Vasantaraga, Bara Iraga, Asavariraga, Pancamaraga, Rajavijaya-Raga, Kedararaga, Lalitaraga, etc (Lochan, n.d., p. 2; Mishra, n.d., p. 223; Mishra, n.d., pp. 231–232). Many of these rāgas can be discerned from the pages of Locana's Rāgataranginī. Consequently, Locana provides insights into notable musicians of the era. Indeed, Locana holds a significant position in the musical history of Mithilā. He provides a comprehensive definition of the Mithilā School of music.

Vidyāpati was a highly esteemed musician. His lyrics are typically intended for singing. He utilized nearly all varieties of lyrics in the Maithili vernacular. The distinguishing characteristics of Maithili lyricism include: 1. Great

musicality. 2. Directness and spontaneity. 3. Length is relative to the mood or emotion being expressed. 4. Virtually limitless in topic area. 5. Inspiration is derived mainly from both everyday occurrences/experiences. 6. Narrative sources include literary works originally composed/studied in Sanskrit. 7. Sanskrit poetic/erotic conventions provide a timeless context for the lyric's imagery/colour. Ikhtisan's Basātin-UI-Uns further elucidates the prevalence of music as a favored activity throughout the examined period. His work sufficiently demonstrates that musical entertainment was highly fashionable among the elite, and on important occasions, ensembles of proficient musicians and skilled performers were summoned to showcase their talents. They performed with chung, nai, daff, rabba, khamacha, and various other instruments. Ikhtisān has delineated these instruments, detailing their form, hue, usability, and function. In *Izāz-I-Khusrawi*, Amir Khusrau allocates a portion to music; nevertheless, he refrains from providing a detailed depiction of instruments such as Rahab, Chung, Tamboor, Nai, Nafier, and Shahnayee, which Ikhtisān elaborates on in his work with considerable embellishment. The music of Mithilā seems to have been influenced by this poet and musician. Furthermore, the melodies of Mithilā engendered a significant cultural institution. Namely, that of the Kirtaniyas. The compositions of Vidyāpati are still audible in every household of Mithilā on several festive occasions, such as Sohar, Nachāri, Samdaun, Jhūmara, Caitavara, and others. Amir Khusrau asserts that Indian music, like to fire that illuminates the heart and soul, is superior to that of any other nation. No foreigner, regardless of the duration of their stay in India, has successfully comprehended its principles or accurately reproduced a single melody. This music possesses a distinctive allure for both humans and animals. Deer have been entranced and captured solely by the use of music (Mishra, 1948, p. 76; *JBR*, n.d.; Thakur, n.d., p. 383). The aforementioned testimonies indicate that music was a prevalent kind of entertainment during the examined period, enjoyed by both royalty and commoners alike. In Mithilā, it was consistently cultivated and supported by the monarchs of Karnātas, Oinwāras, and Khandavālas. Dancing, singing, and dramatic plays were equally popular activities among the people of Mithilā. Both the king and the populace were engaged in these performances. Indeed, dance and play represent Mithilā's distinctive contribution. While we lack a definitive understanding of the venue, it may be asserted that the performances occurred either in palaces or public spaces. It is noteworthy that Nānyadeva, the progenitor of the Karnāta dynasty, authored a commentary on the *Bharatnātyaśāstra*. The popularity of that dance during our era is seen from the sixth kallol of Jyotirīśvara Varṇa Ratnākara. He delineates three categories of dance, namely. (i) Dance description, (ii) character dance description, (iii) inspirational dance description. A pātra is a dancer skilled in thirty-two types of motions and thirty-two types of graces. Diverse forms of dancing are delineated above. The *Nṛtyavidyākathā* in Vidyāpati's *Puruṇa Parikṇā* tells an engaging story on the art form of dance. In order to indicate how the *Rg Veda* was the text for the *Bharata Nātya Śāstra*, the *Sāma Veda* was for singing, the *Yajur Veda* was for knowledge of gestures, and the *Aṭharva Veda* was for knowledge of expressing one's emotions, Vidyāpati cites the *Bharata Nātya Śāstra* (*Bharata*). *Nṛtya* has been classified into two categories (Jyotirishvara, n.d., pp. 64–65; Vidyapati, n.d., pp. 138–139; Vidyapati, n.d., pp. 140–143). The dance of women is referred to as *Lāsyā*, which pleases Gaurī, whereas the dance of males is termed

Tānava, which delights Mahādeva. Grierson asserts that *Lāsyā* is a ballet wherein emotions are conveyed through postures and gestures. He refers to *Tānava*, a fervent dance executed by men in reverence of Śiva. Dancing has been integral to both the refined and rudimentary aspects of life in medieval Mithilā. Religious dances, folk dances, and other dramatic acts frequently provide deeper insights into the lifestyle of the populace. Dramatic performances were highly favored as a form of entertainment. The dramatics were accompanied by dancing and song. *Kirtaniā* drama seems to have enjoyed considerable popularity in Mithilā throughout our era. The inception of this drama is ascribed to Vidyāpati, who is credited with shaping its current shape and character. Vidyāpati authored *Maṇimanjari* and *Gorakṣavijāya Nāṭaka*. It is posited that these two dramas were previously performed in Mithilā. All of this demonstrates that theatrical performances were a favored form of entertainment in Mithilā. In addition to classical dances, there are also references to other folk dances. The region seems to exemplify a mix of classical music and folk dances. The *Varṇa Ratnākara* offers a compelling narrative of folk dances. The *Kirtaniyā* dance appears to be the most ancient folk dance (Grierson, n.d.; Chaudhary, n.d., p. 182; Abul Fazl, n.d., p. 272). It is ancient and linked to the veneration of Viṣṇu. The current form of this dance is attributed to Vidyāpati in Mithilā and *Caitanyadeva* in Bengal. The most notable aspect of the *Kirtaniyās'* dance is its democratic nature, since individuals from the entire village, regardless of wealth or age, actively engaged in these performances. The dance progressively evolved into the renowned *Kirtaniyā* drama of Mithilā throughout the medieval era. Consequently, the *Kirtaniyā* performances conducted at night on rudimentary stage platforms, featuring a distinct class of performers, provided appropriate entertainment for the local populace. The primary objective of the dramatists was to deliver popular performances extolling *Kṛṣṇā*. These dramas were likely profoundly affected by the popular *yātras* and *kirtans* of medieval Bengal, especially Orissa and Assam. The audience consisted of educated individuals and the illiterate, although their shared objective was to seek enjoyment. The *Jaṭa-Jaṭina* dance was another significant folk dance during the examined time. This dance is reported to be absent in other regions of the country. The principal players are *Jaṭa* and *Jaṭina*. During the months of September and October (*Āsvina-Kārtika*), this performance remains prevalent in several villages of Mithilā. The *Jaṭa* is a male protagonist, while the *Jaṭina* is a female protagonist. The attire of *Jaṭa* and *Jaṭina* is distinctive (Mishra, 1948, pp. 289–291; Rakesh, n.d., p. 387; Chaudhary, n.d., pp. 386–388). This dance is a poetic performance only featuring young females. Having adorned themselves elegantly, they stand approximately three yards apart, facing each other. A dozen young ladies line up behind one another and commence their performance with *Maithili* songs presented in a question-and-answer format. This drama portrays the challenges of matrimonial life between the *Jaṭa* and the *Jaṭina*, encompassing both adversities and joys, as well as the grim and violent tendencies exhibited by males, the pressing issues faced by youth, and various other aspects of daily existence. The performance is a straightforward yet exhilarating dance, accompanied by amusing tunes and music, without a designated stage. The need for these dances emerges during periods of inadequate rainfall, as women generally believe that this performance induces precipitation. This dance practice is pretty ancient. The melodies of *Jaṭa* and *Jaṭina* dance can still be heard in the villages of Mithilā during

periods of drought or famine. These songs are not only exhilarating but also possess societal significance as they address issues related to marriage, culture, and other everyday challenges. Shyamā Chakewā is a renowned folk dance that serves as both a significant event and a favored source of entertainment and pleasure, particularly for the youth of the community. References to these traditional dances are found in the Skanda and Padma Purānas. Consequently, the traditional dance of Shyama Chakewa possesses a longstanding legacy. The celebratory performance of Shyamā Chakewā commences in the month of Kārtika during its waxing phase. It mostly features a performance by boys and girls, frequently incorporating young girls and women. Shyamā Chakewā is a rudimentary village dance featuring Shyamā (the girl) and Chakewā (the male) as the principal performers. Shyama is the sister of Chakewa. Besides these two there are six other actors such as (i) Chugla (back biter), (ii) Satbhainyān (seven brothers), and (iii) Khaṇ aricha (Khajana bird), (iv) Vana-Litara (the forest bird), (v) Jhanjhikukura, (a pet dog) and (vi) Vṛndāvana (Thakur, n.d., p. 383). Each of these actors is represented as a clay figure that was specifically made for this occasion. The primary goal of this show is to demonstrate how to inspire unconditional love between siblings, but Chugla attempts to do this with evil methods that cause him to be punished by the girls by having them destroy the image of Chugla four times for seven days while they sing an informal song stating that Chugla should be hanged. The Satabhainyān image represents all brothers and sisters around the world. The many figures crafted from burnt clay are placed in a changeri constructed from bamboo and munja, accompanied by an earthen lamp. The females transport them on their heads while traversing the roads and neighborhoods of the community. The concluding celebration occurs on the day of Kartika Purnima. On that day, a boat made of a plantain tray is assembled, onto which the girls place the broken photos together with flat rice, sweets, curd, and other items. Ultimately, the boat is submerged in a nearby tank or river while the girls sing poignant and emotional farewell songs. A notable performance referred to as Ghasakatti (the grass cutting ritual) or Dasaut is mostly conducted by the women of the Maithila Brāhmaṇas and Kayasthas. The ritualistic event occurs in the courtyard of the bride's parents following the conclusion of the marriage ceremony (Chaudhary, n.d., p. 182).

The bride and groom engage in this dance. The groom must mow the grass and tend to the oxen of his father-in-law, who in return vows to bestow the oxen upon him. A bazaar is conducted where items are both sold and pilfered; consequently, one woman takes on the role of darogā, or sub-inspector, while others assume the positions of constables. An investigation ensues, leading to the groom being declared guilty and subsequently punished. All of this culminates in humor and revelry. The backdrop is enhanced by several folk songs that provide rhythm to the dramatic events. The tradition of this fold-dance is considered ancient, as a comparable mention appears in Kālidāsa's Kumāra-Sambhava. Nayana-jogina is an additional rite associated with the marriage ceremony. Subsequent to the nuptial ceremony, the groom is prompted by a group of women to identify his bride from among two or three veiled girls, one of whom is his own bride. The couple is then instructed to gaze at one another, and the bride is requested to deliver ornaments to her groom as gifts. The women sing songs that serve as a backdrop to the jubilant scene associated with this performance. The experience is straightforward yet

exhilarating for the young couple. This element of the marriage ceremony among the Maithila Brāhmaṇas possesses Tantric significance (Rakesh, n.d., p. 387). The Salhesa-Pūjā, honoring King Salhesa, is predominantly celebrated in Mithilā among the lower castes, manifested as a dance performed by a priest accompanied by a significant song and the rhythmic beat of a Dholaka. He is reputed to be the inaugural Caukidāra and is highly venerated by the Dusādha caste, whose occupation was to serve as caukidārs. Across Mithilā, Salhesa sthānas (places of Salhesa worship) are observable beneath the village pīpal tree, consisting of a red mud platform topped with clay sculptures depicting the diverse characters of the song. The Dusādhas venerate him here. Despite being a song, it is composed in prose and is recited rather than sung. Annually, the dance is executed at the Salhesa-sthāna, where the Dusadha and other village castes congregate with flowers and various objects of veneration. The priest recited mantras and thereafter began to tremble, indicating that King Salhesa had possessed his body (Thakur, n.d., p. 383). He then shouts, flees, and maneuvers on the brink of the blade. The priest thereafter scatters flowers and pronounces blessings upon those who submit various gifts to appease God. After a period, he returns to his original shape, and the celebration concludes. The dance is exhilarating from start to finish, occasionally uplifting and frequently aesthetically attractive. Goraiyan dance, performed by Dhanukas and Musaharas, Serpent Dance, performed by Saperas or Natas Dussad hand is Rahu dance, performed by Musaharas, Dinabhadri, Camaras, Dom, Manachubhi, and Bhikhari Thakurs Bidesiyā. Of these Rāhu-pūjā, performed by the Dussads, is of equal importance to Salhesa pūjā. Other favored dance styles performed by lower castes include Manachubhi (which penetrates the mind) and Bidesiyā, although it is of South Bihar origin (i.e., not original to Mithila). The Muslim marsia dance deserves great distinction. The Muslims in nearly every district of Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur have included dance into their significant mourning time of Muharram as a component of the festivities that convey their sorrow. The primary dances for this event are referred to as Marsia and Jari, signifying mourning. The dancers arrange themselves in a circle, lifting the flowing skirts of their dhotis with one hand, while they move in a rhythmic stamping motion aided by the ball-anklets on their ankles and small bamboo sticks. Accompanying this together with the songs sung by the group's host, the host stands outside of the performers' circle and tells the sad stories of the battle of Kerbala and how both Hassan and Hussain, two brothers died. Acrobats and jugglers are noted for doing an array of odd feats. Jyotirīśvara and Vidyāpati provide insights into such artistic performances (Mishra, n.d., pp. 255–256). Vidyāpati, in his Puruṣa Parīkṣā, alludes to conjurers. The demonstration of an entity that does not exist is termed magic, and an individual proficient in this practice is referred to as a warlock.

Vidyāpati's Puruṣa Parīkṣā references a Pandit Pakśadhara, a Brāhmaṇa renowned for his expertise in sorcery, which he demonstrated to King Rajdeva. The description of Vidyāpati indicates that both the monarchy and the populace were engaged in this activity, rendering it a prevalent form of recreation during the examined period. Jyotirīśvara in Varṇa Ratnākara has also mentioned acrobats (Naṭa and Naṭina) who entertained the populace with their skills. Jyotirīśvara has also referenced jesters and performers (bhat) who entertained both the monarch and the general populace. Several individuals were exceptionally competent, proficient in six languages, seven dialects, eight grammatical structures, writing, and

various tragedies. Vidyapati's *Puruṣa Parīkṣā* likewise alludes to droll humor. The poet states, "one who, through his humorous craft and by altering his physical appearance and voice, becomes the favored of a prominent individual is referred to as droll."

Cultural Synthesis

The composite culture in India likely emerged from an atmosphere of reconciliation rather than rejection, cooperation instead of conflict, and coexistence rather than mutual destruction of the politically dominant Islamic elements, primarily represented by the Turko-Afghan and Mughal cultural amalgamation with the extensive and diverse Hindu traditional substratum, particularly encompassing the Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and various castes and sub-castes across the vast Indo-Gangetic region. The historical origins of composite culture in India can be traced to the period between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries A.D., during which a continuous process of amalgamation occurred between the heritages of two geographically distinct cultural regions: the Arabian-Iranian-Turanian and the Indian, representing the primary sources of religio-ethical systems: Islam and Hinduism (Jayakar, 1971).

Some historiographical schools adhering to a communalist perspective in social analysis misinterpret the history of medieval India by attributing the motives behind armed conflicts and power struggles to religious factors, both in their 'crusading' and 'resisting' dimensions, and considering these as the primary determinants of historical events. This is a biased endeavor to validate the unsustainable assertion that the medieval era in Indian history was characterized by extended and intense war between the two predominant religions, Hinduism and Islam. A meticulous examination of history would disclose that military conflicts were often characterized by the assertion of dynastic prestige and imperial ambitions, occasionally cloaked in the guise of religious propagation to garner the support of Ulamas and nobility, ultimately recorded in official histories (compiled by court chroniclers) as the exploits of an idealistic hero. If one were to rely solely on the court Historians may lead us to erroneously perceive the conflicts between two rival factions of feudal contenders for dominance as fundamentally inter-religious warfare, waged for the glory of God and the welfare of humanity. This would constitute a flagrant falsification of history. To comprehend the authentic socio-cultural landscape, one must depend mostly on the extant religious and hagiographical texts pertaining to Brahmanism, Islam, Sufism, Vaishnavism, and Bhaktism, among others. An examination of these literatures facilitates an understanding of 'cultural synthesis,' a result of borrowing, sharing, and fusing through interactions between multiple streams over time, based on the premise that such cultural symbiosis possesses a tendency for enhanced vitality and broader acceptability (Mishra, n.d., p. 255; Mishra, n.d., pp. 255–256; Chaudhary, n.d., p. 363). This holds true in the vast continental macrocosm of India, and much more so inside a specific region. The cultural compatibility between Hindus and Muslims in Mithilā, encompassing society, religion, literature, and art, is unequivocal. Due to prolonged coexistence, the development of a composite culture and reciprocal exchange between the two populations became commonplace. The time under examination exhibits several instances of cultural synthesis in governance, society, religion, and literature.

Conclusion

The artistic traditions of medieval Mithilā present a rich and multifaceted cultural landscape marked by continuity, innovation, and synthesis. From temple architecture and sculptural forms to the vibrant traditions of painting such as Aipana and Kohabara, Mithilā demonstrated a deep aesthetic sensibility rooted in its social and religious life. Music, dance, and dramatic performances further enriched this cultural milieu, serving both as refined arts and as popular means of recreation. The contributions of scholars, poets, and musicians, along with the participation of common people, ensured that these traditions were not confined to elite circles but were widely shared across society. What stands out most prominently is the harmonious blending of classical and folk elements, as well as indigenous and external influences, particularly in architecture and music. This synthesis not only enriched the cultural heritage of Mithilā but also contributed to the broader development of Indian art and culture. Thus, the artistic expressions of Mithilā were not merely decorative or performative; they were integral to the lived experience of its people, reflecting their beliefs, aspirations, and creative imagination.

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