



# GODNA PAINTING

Compiled By



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## **CONTENTS:**

1. Location
2. Introduction
3. History
4. Difference Between Mithila Painting And Godna Painting
5. Process
6. Range Of The Products
7. Market
8. Packaging Of Products
9. Changes In Recent Years
10. Problem Faced By Artisans
11. References

## 1. Location of the Craft Cluster-

We visited village Jitwarpur for documentation of Mithila Godna painting. This village is situated in Madhubani. To reach Jitwarpur there is bus service available but if you are going by own mode of transportation it is much better in terms of convenience as well as you will be able to spend some time in the natural beauty of that village.



## 2. INTRODUCTION

There is a region in North Bihar called Mithila. Actually Mithila was one of the first Kingdom to be established in eastern India. The region is a vast plain stretched north towards Nepal , south towards, the Ganges and west towards West Bengal. Mithila region covers Darbhanga, Madhubani, Samastipur, Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, Supaul, and some parts of Munger, Bhagalpur, Begusarai, and purnia District of Bihar Some parts of Mithila comes under the province of Nepal



*Artisan Raudi Paswan and his family  
(Jitwarpur) Madhubani*



*Woman doing godna painting*

We know through our Hindu mythology that, Rama, the Prince of Ayodhya, married Princess Sita, daughter of king Janaka of Janakpuri (now in Nepal) of Mithila Raj, so she is also called Maithili in our religious texts.

Mithila is a beautiful place if monsoon remains good., because all the commercial activities of this Mithila area depend upon good monsoon. But maximum times either less monsoon create major drought in this area or heavy rain due to much monsoon creates terrible situation in this economically poor region of North Bihar. After many successive droughts in early sixty , Indian Government emissaries came to see the condition of the starving people of Mithila and saw the arts and paintings on the walls of huts of the poor villagers. Then they decided to help these people and save the tradition of the wall paintings. Rapidly , throughout India and abroad Mithila Paintings started getting popularity. The traditional wall paintings as well as surface paintings for the beautification of

dwellings and ritual purposes in Mithila is believed to have survived from epic period. From generation to generation the women of Mithila have produced a great style of wall and floor paintings (Aripan). Godna Painting, very similar in look but different in motifs and cast of painters came forward after many years. It was not until 1972, that is ,about five years after Brahmans and Kayastha women as well as men , mostly in Jitwarpur (Madhubani) village also began to do their Godna Painting commercially. In this Mithila region Brahmans and Kayasthas pictorial style of paintings are known as Madhubani or Mithila Painting.



*Godna painting*

### 3. HISTORY

There is a third group of painters of Paswan community other than Kayasthas and Brahmins. This third group of Harijans came forward much latter. The women of Dusadh cast and some other Harijans as Chamar were doing all forms of traditional paintings and art forms for ritual purposes and also for the decoration of their huts. They were not allowed to represent divinities and can only find inspiration from the animals, mineral and vegetable worlds. Their style of painting is known as Godna Painting. It is easily recognizable due the very unique background which is done with diluted cow dung. They also experimented Godna (tattoo) style and other bright colours in their paintings due to the influence they got from the entrepreneurship and experiments of Brahmins and Kayasthas women. Their pictorial alphabet began to include lines, waves, circles, sticks and snails and became more abstract.



*Tattoo on hand*

The main deity of the Dusadh's is Raja Sailesh (also called Salhesh ) whose village shrine ( Gahbar) is usually adorned with paintings based on the their legends. They used to make similar scenes and clay reliefs of animals and birds on the walls of their clay huts, which became a very rare thing today.

If we go back to the history , we find that Godna painting is derived from the Godna (tattoo) making art of Nattins (women of gypsy tribe ).They used to travel from village to village making different styles of Godna on the bodies of the villagers. The poor women of lower casts who had to struggle even to survive could not afford to wear jewelry, so they liked Godna and love to get different styles of Godna on their body by Nattins. Even today one can see Godna on the body of old ladies in this area. But that body piercing process of Godna was very painful.



*Tattoo on hand*

A German film maker and folklorist named Erica Moser saw these Godnas on the body of women during her several months visit to Jitwarpur for making of a documentary film in 1970. She was very impressed by this Godna and advised Paswan women to do the same Godna on the paper.. Thus Godna paintings on the paper came into existence.

There are many outsiders who have recognized the inherent strengths of these wall paintings and the creativity of its artisan. They came to this backward Mithila region, stayed with them, interacted and encouraged various forms of innovation. They have done a great jobs and brought this Harijan style of painting to the attention of larger and distinct audience. William and Mildred Archer were the first among them who worked a lot between 1930 to 1940 to save the very old and artistic style of wall and floor paintings of this Mithila region of North Bihar. Uppendra Maharathi ,Bhaskar Kulkarni, Pupul Jaykar had done the same jobs between 1950s to 1970s. Raymond, Naomi & Ray Owens, Jyotindra Jain, and Tokio Hasegawa are among those who

came latter and tried their best to save this antique style of paintings and to take these poor artists in the lime light of the art loving world. It was not until 1972 , about five years after Brahmans and Kayasthas women, mostly from Jitwarpur and Ranti Villages of Madhubani District began to do commercial painting, Dusadh women as well as men also started to do paintings on papers. Previously Dusadhs did not do ritually oriented wall paintings inside their homes. Occasionally they painted on the exterior and interior walls of their house with ornamental motifs and religious themes . They liked to paint serpent deities, animals, birds, and plants.



*Godna painting on the wall*



*Painting of lord salhesh on the wall*

#### 4. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MITHILA PAINTING AND GODNA PAINTING

1. Godna Painting is done by the Paswans where Mithila painting is done by the women of Brahmans and Kayasthas
2. Godna Painting is a lower casts (Harijan) painting where Mithila Painting is an upper casts painting.
3. Godna painting is a tribal painting where Mithila painting is painted by the land lords.
4. Dusadhs get their inspirations from the animal, mineral, or vegetable worlds but Brahmans and Kayasthas find their inspiration from the sacred texts of Hindu mythologies.
5. Mithila painting got a worldwide recognition earlier than the Godna painting.
6. The origin of Mithila painting seems very ancient than Godna painting .
7. Godna painting is very much inspired by body painting (tattoo) where Mithila painting is inspired through wall and floor painting.
8. Dusadh painters have depicted only Raja Salhesh and his brothers in their paintings where Upper casts have drawn mostly Gods and Goddesses e.g. Shiva, Durga, Kali, rama, Hanumana, and specially Krishna and Radha in their paintings.
9. Paswans use the light brown cow dung washed handmade papers as their canvas but Brahmans and Kayasthas use plain white handmade papers for paintings.



*Mithila painting*



*Godng painting*

10. Harijans generally use more colours than upper casts.

## 5. PROCESS

Being the folk the villages, these artists depend on the natural sources for colours. Nature provides them with a wonderful range of natural colours derived from Bark, Leaf, flowers, seeds, and berries of the plants and trees. Clay and cow dung is also used in making of colours for the Harijan style of painting (godna) handmade papers is washed in cow dung and dried before using it as a canvas for paintings.

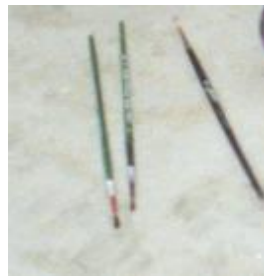
Usually they use 3 kinds of brushes-

1. They use bamboo twigs for the intricate details.
2. Small piece of cloth or cotton is used for filling in or space.
3. These days they have started readymade brushes and holder pens for more precise output.

Due to better commercialisation of their paintings these days they are using synthetic colours easily available in the market. Now, colours come in powdered form which are then mixed with goat's milk before using.

Making process of Natural colour-

Black- carbon  
Red- Bark of *peepal* tree  
Green-leaves of *sem*  
Blue- *sikkat* seeds  
Yellow-*Harsingar*, Turmeric



**Brushes**



**Colour**



**Raw material of Natural colour**





*Doing Godna painting on canvas  
(process)*

## 6. RANGE OF THE PRODUCT

Godna painting is done for both decoration as well as utilitarian purpose. Initially, as we know that it is on walls and paper and there they progressed towards conceptualising to do Godna painting on various products.

### DECORATIVE PRODUCTS:-

For decoration purpose they are doing painting walls, paper, brass, terracotta and glass.

### UTILITARIAN PRODUCTS:-

Doing Godna painting on canvas with the change in consumer taste and demand, consumers are interested and satisfied if they are able to get these traditional paintings done on their utility products. So the artisans are now taking initiatives in the development of such kind of utility products. Regarding utilitarian products this painting is mainly done on paper products and fabric.

Main products are:-

Sarees, Greeting , Suits, Cushion covers, Tie, Dupattas, shirts, Cost range of these products starts from Rs.25 to Rs. 15000

## 7. MARKET

Godna painting has a very good market for their products both nationally and internationally. Its products are available in local shops as well as in Design store and exports stores. Craft fairs and exhibitions also keep in expanding the market and provides a platform for proper exposure. Due to this expansion of market the labour is getting fairly good price. The prevalent ratio of labour are:-

- To do painting on a sarees pallu and border labour cost is Rs.1500
- To make a panel of 22 inches by 30 inches they charge from Rs.200 to Rs.500
- If they paint a butta on cushion cover on handkerchief they charge from Rs.75 to 100

## 8. PACKAGING OF PRODUCTS

For packing of products they are still not developed. The painting they just roll it in paper and after that wrap it with polythene. For other products they do not follow any specific pattern of packaging they just wrap it in paper. When they give delivery of orders they just put a tag of their society .example. *Salhesh Harijan Hastkala Udyog Samiti*.

## **9. CHANGES IN RECENT YEARS**

Technology -

- Now they have started design painting on Fabric, Brass, Terracotta and glass. As they can not use natural colours for this so for this they are using enamel and fabric colours.

Design-

As such there are no major changes occurring in Godna Painting. Only the jewellery motifs which used on body are no longer in use. Only *Salhesh* and stories related to him are main motif of these paintings new a days. Now they have started doing this painting on a wide range of products but the motifs are same.

Market-

New the market has shifted from local market to international market. Its market is wide spread and new market has shifted from traditional to consumes. The artisans are engaged more in producing those goods that are fetching them more money.

## **10. PROBLEM FACED BY ARTISANS**

Main problem faced by the artisans engaged in this craft is that they are not receiving fair share in income earned but the society. So they are still facing economical crisis and are leading a life in poverty. Further there are problems regarding the lack of basic infrastructure facilities. So even this craft has received international fame but an average artisan is not benefitted by that exposure still now.

## **11. REFERENCES:**

CONTACT PERSON-

We got maximum of necessary information for this documentation from Raudi Paswan. Artisan of Jitwarpur village (Madhubani).

LOCATION-

We saw Godna painting process areas in Jitwarpur village of Madhubani.

BOOKS-

Arts and Crafts of India - Nicholas Barnard  
The Craft Tradition of India - Jaya Jaitly  
Indian Crafts Tradition- Kamladevi Chattopadhyay

INTERNET SITES-

[www.craftrevival.org](http://www.craftrevival.org)  
[www.shalincraft.com](http://www.shalincraft.com)  
[www.rowvision.com](http://www.rowvision.com)

And different sites on -crafts of Bihar.

