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### **Kohbar Painting of Mithila, Nepal: A Study of Intangible Cultural Heritage**


Lok Nath Dulal<sup>1</sup>, Radha Adhikari<sup>2</sup> and Sapna Singh<sup>3</sup>


<sup>1</sup>Central Department of Nepalese History, Culture and Archaeology


<sup>2</sup>The Department of Culture, Tri-Chandra Campus

<sup>3</sup>Padmakanya Multiple Campus

#### **Author Note**

Lok Nath Dulal, Ph.D.  <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-0506-3557> is an Associate Professor at Central Department of Nepalese History, Culture and Archaeology, TU, Nepal.

Radha Adhikari  <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8757-2214> is an Assistant Professor at The Department of Culture, Tri-Chandra Campus, TU.

Sapna Singh  <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2879-4782> is a student of BPSG Program at Padmakanya Multiple Campus.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lok Nath Dulal, Central Department of Nepalese History, Culture and Archaeology, TU, Nepal. Email: [dulaloknath@gmail.com](mailto:dulaloknath@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Kohbar is a kind of painting that was created specifically on the wall and the floor of homes, and other monuments in the Mithila region. For this reason, it is regarded as an incredible piece of Maithili cultural art history. Thus, this paper has been produced to address the gaps and issues with the major goal to examine and highlight the idea of Kohbar painting, as well as its history, practices, creation techniques, types of materials, typologies, symbols, significance and an intangible cultural heritage unique to Mithila region and Nepal. The cultural importance and symbolic connotations that are woven into the elaborate patterns and motifs of Kohbar art have been explored in this study. Likewise, this study investigates the historical development, socio-cultural background, and ceremonial elements connected to Kohbar art using an interdisciplinary approach that combines art history, anthropology, and intangible cultural studies. Furthermore, this study looks at the relevance and difficulties that Kohbar art still faces today in the context of modernity and globalization, highlighting the importance of cultural revitalization and preservation initiatives. This article bases on qualitative information acquired in the form of both the primary and secondary data. The primary data have been collected from the Janakpur arts and culturally related stakeholders by using interview and group discussion whereas the secondary information has generated through the literature review.

*Keywords:* folk artists and craftsmanship, history and practices, intangible cultural heritage, Kohbar art, Mithila culture

### **Kohbar Painting of Mithila, Nepal: A Study of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

*Kohbar* painting is one of the important art forms of *Mithila* culture of Nepal. *Mithila* region is home to the flourishing as nuptial chamber art scene, often known as *Kohbar* painting or *Kohbar ghar*. *Mithila* is a region known for its rich cultural legacy and artistic traditions. It includes a wide variety of artistic manifestations, with *Kohbar* art being one of its most notable genres. *Kohbar* art has centuries-old roots that are intricately entwined with the socio-cultural fabric and ritualistic customs of the area.

It is obvious that human settlement, culture, and civilization have a long history in *Mithila* region. *Mithila* region was first referenced by *Satapatha Brahman*. Later it is described as a sacred site and distinct kingdom of *Videha* in other Sanskrit, Buddhist, and Jain literatures (Dulal, et al., 2023). *Satapatha Brahmana* religious text claims that in the past, non-Aryan peoples lived there and the area was covered in woods and waiting land (Jha, 1983). In the past, the Kingdom of *Mithila* stretched between the *Koshi* and *Gandaki* rivers and from the Himalayas in the north to the Ganges in the south. The area of *Mithila* was watered by fifteen rivers, according to ancient sources. The kingdom was called *Tirabhukti*, also known as *Tirhut*, *Videh*, and *Yajnakhsetra* (Pandey, 2008).

Particularly in *Pauranic* literature Nimi was the founder and ruler who gave the *Videha* kingdom its name, according to the *Vishnu Puran*. The Nimi dynasty's 22nd descendant was Janak, son of Rasworoma (Thakur, 1956, p. 30). The city of *Janakpur* is thought to be the birthplace of Goddess Sita as well as the location of her marriage to Lord Ram (Jha, 1983). *Mithila* has an impact on patriarchal *Vedic* culture (Rana, 2021). Currently, in *Mithila* region there includes many territories such as *Madhubani*, *Darbhanga*, *Sitamadi*, *Mujefarpur*, *Saharsa*, *Bhagalpur*, *Purniya*, *North Munger*, *Jharkhanda*, India, and *Morang*, *Sunsari*, *Saptari*, *Siraha*, *Sarlahi*, *Dhanusha*, and *Mahottari* of Nepal (Bimal, 2070).

During the reign of king Janak, the capital was *Janakpur*. With a variety of handicrafts and designs etched onto the walls of Janaki Temple, *Mithila* is recognized one of the important destination of cultural, traditional, and religious illumination. The eastern area, which includes parts of India that hug the border, is known as the *Mithila* region and includes the *Siraha*, *Saptari*, *Dhanusha*, *Sarlahi*, and *Mahottari*.

*Mithila* region is as an important cultural centre. It has also identified *Mithila* painting in the forms of *Kohbar* and *Aripana* arts (Bimal, 2070). Among them, the *kohbar* or *puren*, one of these rituals painting that are most well-known and iconic. Originally, these were painted in the nuptial chamber i.e. in *kohbar ghar*, where the bride and groom consummate their marriage. The most brightly painted room in the house is the one where the newlyweds spend their first four nights together. The primary themes of these *Kohbar* paintings are prosperity and love. *Kohbar*, as the *Kayast has* called it, is depicted in most renditions with faces hidden behind the lotus circles.

*Kohbar* painting is a multifaceted cultural legacy in the *Mithila* region, but adequate studies on different issues are still remaining under research. All of these concerns have been recognized as the study based on literature review. Therefore, the researchers aim to minimally bridge to address the aforementioned research gaps and issues through the paper entitled *Kohbar Painting of Mithila, Nepal: A Study of Intangible Cultural Heritage*.

### **Research Problem and Gaps**

Numerous studies have been done on various art forms, particularly painting, but none have focused specifically on the *Kohbar* floor painting of the Maithili civilization of the *Mithila* region as an intangible cultural asset. Many facets of *Kohbar's* painting including what exactly is *Kohbar* painting? What is its history? Why and how is it made? What supplies and techniques are employed in

the making of these paintings? To what extent is the *Mithila* region's intangible cultural heritage recognized? are still untapped. The aforementioned concerns are recognized as study gaps and problems that consistently motivate scholars to conduct this research.

### **Research Objectives**

The primary objective of this study is to delve into the cultural significance encapsulated within *Kohbar* art, a distinctive form of visual expression originating from the *Mithila* region in Nepal. To achieve this, the study will focus on two specific objectives: comprehensive documentation and analysis of *Kohbar* art, and the development of advocacy and preservation strategies for this unique art form. By addressing these goals, the study hopes to advance knowledge of *Kohbar* art as a cultural phenomenon and emphasize its importance concerning Nepal's *Mithila* culture.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data collection took place in the *Janakpur* area, focusing on local and culturally embedded stakeholders. Researchers conducted observations and semi-structured interviews in both group settings and individual interactions to gather in-depth insights. Observations included documenting artistic processes, materials used, and environmental influences during the creation of *Mithila* paintings. The interviews were conducted with local artists, community members, and representatives from the *Janakpur* Women's Development Center (JWDC). Topics covered included traditional techniques, symbolism in *Mithila* art, and the socio-economic impact of their work. These interviews were complemented by focus group discussions to capture diverse perspectives and collective experiences. Fieldwork extended to multiple villages like *Kuwa*, *Kapileshwor* and *Matsyagandha* within *Janakpur* Municipality, selected for their historical and cultural significance in *Mithila* art.

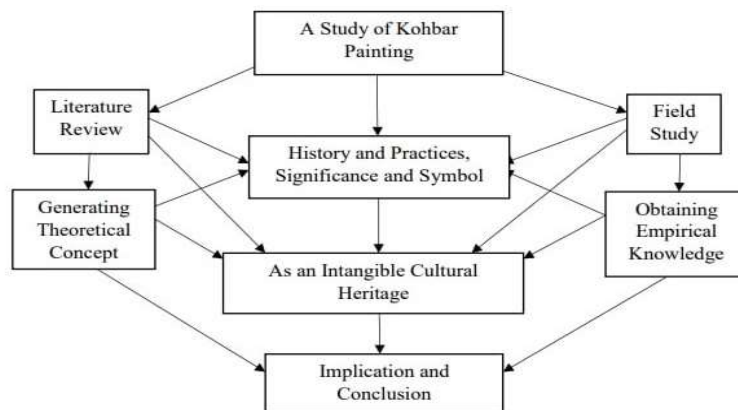
The selection process was informed by recommendations from local scholars and community leaders to ensure representative and meaningful engagement with the community. Secondary data included a review of existing literature, historical records, and prior research on *Mithila* art. This data was used to validate and contextualize the primary findings. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns, cultural symbols, and emerging themes relevant to the research questions.

### Conceptual Framework

This paper clarifies the concept of *Kohbar* and aids in the exploration of its symbols and meaning, history and customs, causes of creation, types and typology, folk artists and their craftsmanship, techniques and materials, objects and motifs connected to this *Mithila* region's and as an intangible cultural heritage. For addressing the above-mentioned research gaps and problems as well as fulfilling the determined objectives, this paper has been prepared by applying the conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework for the Paper*



### Discussion and Results

Based on research objectives, researchers have asked about traces of the historical evolution and traditional practices of *Kohbar* painting, including its symbolic motifs, ritualistic aspects, and socio-cultural significance and as an intangible cultural heritage within the *Mithila* region. It is looking forward to analyze of the symbolic motifs and designs of *Kohbar* art to understand their cultural meanings and ritualistic significance, examining the methods, materials used, and reasons behind their creation. Finally, after completing the 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 symbolic meaning, significance and as an intangible cultural heritage as well in chronological order. After doing critical discussion of aforementioned issues, conclusion of the paper has been drawn.

#### Concept of Kohbar Art

The concept of *Kohbar* art is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of the *Mithila* region, primarily found in Nepal and parts of India. *Kohbar* art, also known as *Kohbar* painting or *Kohbar ghar*, holds significant cultural and ritualistic importance within the *Mithila* community (Jain, 1994). The Maithili word "*kohvar*," which refers to the wedding or bridal chamber, is where the term "*Kohbar*" originates (Archer, 1949). The themes in *Kohbar* art have been derived from ordinary life, regional folklore, and Hindu mythology, and they represent the *Mithila* community's religious and cultural values (Madhok, 2005).

Traditionally, the wedding chamber's walls were covered in murals that acted as lucky charms to bestow fertility, prosperity, and marital bliss and happiness upon the newlyweds. With time, *Kohbar* painting transcended its ceremonial setting and developed into an important visual storytelling medium that portrayed

folktales, depicting mythological narratives, and cultural themes and motifs that were passed down through the generations.



*Note.* The picture depicts Traditional Kohbar Art and was obtained through field research.

*Kohbar* painting is characterized by its bold lines, vibrant colors, and intricate patterns, often executed using natural pigments and brushes made from bamboo sticks. The motifs found in *Kohbar* art are deeply symbolic, drawing inspiration from Hindu mythology, local folklore, and everyday life. Common motifs include peacocks, fish, lotus flowers, and geometric patterns, each carrying specific meanings and auspicious symbolism. *Kohbar* painting plays a central role in various ritualistic practices and ceremonies within the *Mithila* community, symbolizing blessings, protection, and prosperity.

During weddings, *Kohbar* paintings are created to bless the couple and ensure a harmonious and prosperous married life. Similarly, during childbirth, *Kohbar* art is used to invoke blessings for the mother and child. It is traditionally passed down through generations within families, with techniques and motifs



often inherited and taught from mothers to daughters. Overall, the concept of *Kohbar* art embodies the rich cultural heritage and artistic traditions of the *Mithila* community, serving as a testament to the enduring legacy of this vibrant art form.

### **History of Kohbar Painting**

As the mother of all other sculpture art, the history of creation of painting is old than other forms of arts. Archaeological findings discovered from the different prehistoric caves of France, Spain and elsewhere suggest that the people of prehistoric culture were skilled to create beautiful and wonderful art specimens as the form of paintings (Dulal, 2019). According to Burkitt (1992, p. 237):

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 *Upanishadic* way of life and the era of the *Brahmanas* did not promote art in the *Mithila* region. The region was only considered a source of sexual pleasure under the reign of King Janak (Thakur, 1956). The most ancient folk and indigenous art of the Maithili household work in the *Mithila* region, Southern *Terai* of Nepal, is known as *Mithila* art, which is a distinctive feature of *Mithila* culture. The origin of *Mithila* arts are thought to date back around three thousand years, to the time when the great Aryans arrived and settled in this area and began painting murals on the walls for ornamentation (Chaudhary, 1976).

*Kohbar* art has a rich history that dates back centuries in the *Mithila* region, encompassing present day Nepal and parts of India. Over time, it evolved into a distinct artistic tradition with symbolic motifs and ritualistic significance. It is considered auspicious and is believed to bring blessings, prosperity, and marital bliss to the newlywed couple. The intricate designs and symbolic motifs serve as visual blessings for the couple's future life together. The tradition of painting the nuptial chamber, or *Kohbar Ghar*, dates back around 2500 years, when it was painted at the *Mithila* palace in *Janakpur* to represent bride Sita and groom Ram's happy married life. Ever then, it has been common to have what is called *Kohbar* painting on the walls of the nuptial chamber during the solemnization of marriage in *Mithila*. In this picture, the *Navgraha* i.e. nine planets are also given space to bestow blessings onto the newlyweds.



*Note.* The picture depicts worshipping Kohbar at the time of marriage. It was obtained from field data.

The first critic to understand the tortoises are the diagrammatic of the lovers union and the bamboo tree and the ring of lotuses as schematics of the sexual organs (Archer, 1949). Since then, the majority of Western commentators have interpreted the *Khobar* painting as a sexual performance (Vequaud, 1977). The *Kohbar's* basic design and composition is heavily charged with tantric symbolism. Another example is the yoni, which is often drawn as a fully-opened lotus.

Some scholars reject the aforementioned criticism, and calling it is a free-floating symbolic interpretation (Brown, 1996). Sexual interpretation, interprets the lotus in the *Kohbar* painting that has been pierced by a shaft as a symbol of fecundity (Jain, 1997). Many scholars have confused lotus leaves for two flowers due of their flowery shape. Similar to this, the "stem and roots" of the lotus plant are intended to be seen as the center vertical stem cutting across the ring of lotus leaves, not a bamboo shaft (Burkert & Sethi, n.d.).

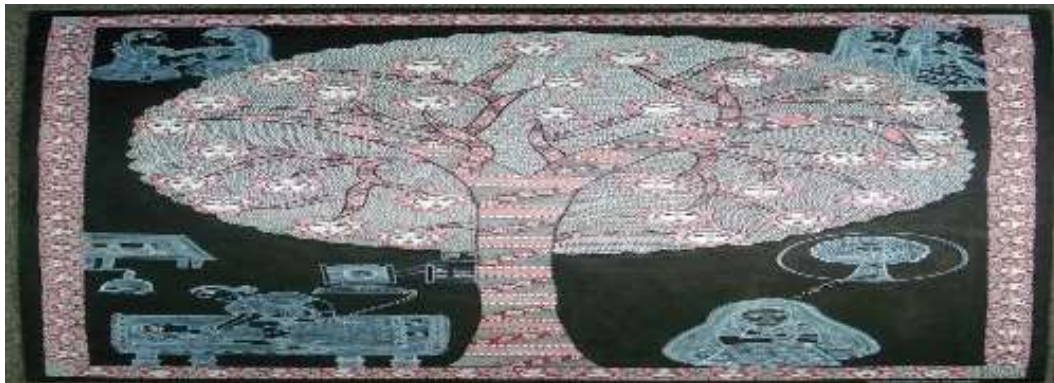
There is assumption moved forward that women-artists of *Mithila* cannot keep themselves immune from the patriarchal discourse on *tantra* which has influenced *Mithila* art, but they also bring their agency of wifehood and fertility into the foreground. Later on, as a creative sensibility developed gradually, a large number of religious and secular art pieces that are now known as *Mithila* art were produced in this area.



*Note.* The figure represents Ardhanarishwara Shiva and Parvati. Painted by Hira Devi, it was retrieved from <https://www.exoticindiaart.com>

This androgynous manifestation of Shiva and Parvati valorizes the union of female and male energies as the root and womb of all creation. The Hindu doctrine of *tantra* patriarchal discourse on the creative and destructive force of Gauri is the basis for the aesthetics of *Kohbar* paintings (Jha, n.d.). However, *Maithil* women painters draw from this tradition while also departing from it. While the geometrical lines in *Kohbar* paintings are similar to those in *Aripana* and represent the sexual potency of males (Shiva) and females (Shakti), the modifications created by female artists change the emphasis from sexual pleasure to conjugal fondness, fertility, and prosperity. Hence, wifhood and motherhood are the feminine ideals that *Kohbar* paintings elevate, departing from the patriarchal view that a woman's sexuality is both creative and destructive.

*Kohbar* painting is characterized by detailed designs, brilliant colors, and significant themes. The use of visual components, motifs, and patterns to elucidate deeper meanings and cultural importance is known as symbolism in *Kohbar* art. Aspects of Hindu mythology, regional folklore, religious convictions, and societal mores could all be represented by these symbols (Thames & Rekha, 2010).



*Note.* The painting by Gunjeshwar Kumari represents the theme ‘Better a tree than a girl.’ It was retrieved from <https://elibrary.tucl.edu.np/bitstream>

The logonomic system in tolerates the forced abortion of girl babies. Set against a black background, the incised white images, like specters in a nightmare, tell the story of a marriage and the young mother’s reluctant abortion of her female fetus. In her sorrow, she sees a tree blossom with pink flowers and imagines the flowers to be the spirits of all the aborted baby girls.

### **Types and Typologies**

*Mithila* arts are interpreted outside of the context of the region's social semiotics, issues can develop. The authenticity and authentic meanings of Maithili arts are lost when seen under the prism of Freudian psychoanalysis. It has also demonstrated how western academicians romanticized history by interpreting *Maithil* art through lenses from other planets. In the process, the voices of women were muted. Our comprehension of *Maithil's* art is complicated by interpretations that the artists themselves internalized and expressed. *Kohbar* painting one of the forms of *Mithila* art, originating from the *Mithila* region in Nepal and parts of India, encompasses various types and typologies characterized by their motifs, themes, and cultural significance.

#### ***Wedding Kohbar Art***

This type of Kohbar art is created to adorn the bridal chamber (Kohbar) during weddings. It is characterized by elaborate designs and symbolic motifs intended to bless the newlywed couple and ensure marital bliss, fertility, and prosperity. Common motifs include images of the bride and groom, peacocks (symbolizing fertility and beauty), lotus flowers (symbolizing purity and auspiciousness), elephants (symbolizing strength and stability), and geometric patterns.



*Note.* Ram Sita wedding by Vidyanath Jha, retrieved from [heartforartonline.com](http://heartforartonline.com)

### ***Festival Kohbar Art***

During religious festivals and cultural celebrations, *Kohbar* art may be created as part of the decorative displays in homes and community spaces. These artworks often feature motifs and symbols associated with the specific festival or occasion, such as images of gods and goddesses, sacred animals, religious symbols, and auspicious patterns.

### ***Narrative Kohbar Art***

Narrative *Kohbar* art depicts mythological stories, folk tales, and historical events through intricate paintings. Artists use *Kohbar* art as a medium for storytelling, conveying moral lessons, cultural values, and historical narratives through visual representations and symbolic imagery.

### ***Contemporary Kohbar Art***

In recent years, artists have been exploring new themes, styles, and mediums within the realm of *Kohbar* art, adapting traditional techniques to contemporary contexts.



*Note.* Saree with Kohbar design, retrieved from <https://www.madhubanipaints.com>

This *saree* has a depiction of *Kohbar* design from *maithil* culture on centre surrounded by *swayambar* design, borders have bride groom seen doing a *viddha* from marriage ceremony. Contemporary *Kohbar* art may feature innovative interpretations of traditional motifs, experimentation with color palettes and compositions, and integration of modern themes and cultural influences.

### ***Regional Variations***

*Kohbar* art exhibits regional variations within the *Mithila* region, with distinct styles and motifs influenced by local customs, traditions, and artistic practices. For example, the *Kohbar* art of *Madhubani* in India may have different motifs and color schemes compared to the *Kohbar* art of *Janakpur* in Nepal, reflecting the unique cultural heritage of each locality. These types and typologies of *Kohbar* art reflect this vibrant artistic tradition's diversity, creativity, and cultural significance within the *Mithila* community.



*Note.* Mithila Painting in Godana Style, retrieved from <https://itokri.com>

### ***Objects and Motifs***

The study has provided valuable insights into the rich cultural heritage and artistic traditions of *Kohbar* painting within the *Mithila* culture in Nepal. *Kohbar* painting, originating from the *Mithila* region of Nepal and India, is characterized by a rich array of symbolic motifs and objects that convey auspicious meanings and blessings. The following are some of the common objects and motifs found in *Kohbar* painting:

**Peacock:** The peacock symbolizes beauty, fertility, and abundance, reflecting its cultural significance across South Asian art traditions (Krishna & Singh, 2017). It is often depicted with vibrant plumage and graceful poses, representing prosperity and auspiciousness.

**Lotus Flower:** Scholars such as Misra (2014) emphasize the lotus flower holds deep symbolic significance in Hindu culture and is a common motif in *Kohbar* art. It symbolizes purity, enlightenment, and spiritual growth, often depicted in full bloom with intricate petals and vibrant colors.





*Note.* Lord Vishnu on a reclining pose, retrieved from <https://elibrary.tucl.edu.np>

**Elephant:** The elephant is a symbol of strength, wisdom, and prosperity in Hindu mythology. Scholars like Pant (2019) note its presence in traditional Mithila paintings as a symbol of stability and prosperity, often adorned to signify its auspicious role. In *Kohbar* painting, elephants are depicted with decorative adornments, carrying auspicious connotations and blessings for the viewer.

**Fish:** Fish are often depicted in *Kohbar* painting as symbols of fertility, abundance, and prosperity. They represent the cycle of life, growth, and renewal, and are associated with blessings for marital harmony and reproductive success. This symbolism has been highlighted in comparative studies of *Mithila* and Bengali art traditions, underscoring their shared cultural meanings (Das, 2015).

**Swans:** Swans are revered in Hindu mythology as symbols of purity, grace, and beauty. In *Kohbar* painting, swans are depicted gracefully swimming in pairs, symbolizing love, devotion, and marital bliss. Researchers like Jha (2018) explore their role as symbolic representations of love and devotion, adding depth to their portrayal in *Kohbar* paintings.

**Sun and Moon:** The sun and moon are celestial symbols commonly found in *Kohbar* art, representing light, energy, and cosmic balance. They symbolize the divine forces of creation and renewal, bestowing blessings for prosperity and

harmony. These themes have parallels in broader Indian artistic traditions, as explored by Singh and Sharma (2020).



*Note.* Brahmin style in bright colours by Sita Devi, retrieved from <https://goodcssm.live/product>

**Trees and Plants:** Trees and plants are recurring motifs in *Kohbar* art, representing growth, abundance, and fertility. Floral patterns, fruit-bearing trees, and lush vegetation symbolize the fecundity of nature and blessings for prosperity and well-being. Their recurrence in *Kohbar* art aligns with ecological and cultural interpretations by environmental art scholars (Mitra, 2016).

**Mandalas and Geometric Patterns:** *Mandalas* and geometric patterns are intricately woven into *Kohbar* art, symbolizing unity, harmony, and cosmic order. These symmetrical designs have been extensively studied by scholars like Tripathi (2017). These symmetrical designs invoke blessings for balance, symmetry, and spiritual harmony.

**Gods and Goddesses:** Depictions of Hindu gods and goddesses, such as Ganesha, Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Shiva, are common in *Kohbar* art. Studies in South Asian religious art, such as those by Dasgupta (2018), emphasize the dual aesthetic and devotional purposes of these motifs. These divine figures embody auspicious qualities and blessings associated with wealth, wisdom, and divine protection.



*Note.* Goddess Kali standing on Lord Shiva, retrieved from <https://market.unicefusa.org>

**Wedding Scenes:** *Kohbar* art often includes depictions of traditional wedding scenes, featuring the bride and groom, marriage rituals, and festive celebrations. Scholar such as Chaudhary (2021) symbolizes the art of love, unity, and the sacred bond of marriage, invoking blessings for marital happiness and prosperity.



*Note.* Sita performing Gauri puja at the time of her wedding, retrieved from <https://indianfolkart.org>

These objects and motifs in *Kohbar* art serve as visual blessings, conveying auspicious meanings and blessings for fertility, prosperity, marital harmony, and spiritual well-being within the *Mithila* community.

### ***Tantric Influence in Kohbar Art***

The influence of *Tantra* in *Kohbar* art is an intriguing aspect that reveals deeper layers of symbolism and spiritual significance within this traditional art form. While *Kohbar* art is primarily associated with auspicious blessings and cultural traditions, it also reflects underlying Tantric principles and motifs.

**Sacred Symbols and Yantras:** As noted by Vequaud (1977) and Rana (2021), *Tantra* incorporates a rich array of sacred symbols and geometric diagrams known as *Yantras*, which represent cosmic energies and divine principles. These symbols are often integrated into *Kohbar* art, infusing it with deeper spiritual meanings and transformative power. *Yantras* such as *Sri Yantra*, representing the divine feminine energy, and *Shri Shri Yantra*, symbolizing cosmic harmony, may appear in *Kohbar* paintings, enhancing their potency as spiritual tools. Artwork by Vidyanath Jha (available at Exotic India Art) presents Kali as one of the most important *tantric Dasamahavidyas*, as a conglomeration of terrifying elements.



*Note.* Kali with her *Yantra* by Vidyanath Jha, retrieved from <https://www.exoticindiaart.com/>

**Mantras and Sacred Texts:** Tantra emphasizes the use of sacred sounds and chants (Mantras) as vehicles for spiritual transformation and divine communion as described by Dulal (2019). *Kohbar* art may incorporate written or visual representations of Sanskrit mantras, prayers, or sacred texts, invoking divine blessings and protection. As documented by Jha (1983) and others, the

inclusion of mantras in Kohbar art not only enhances its spiritual significance but also serves as a form of devotional practice, imbuing the artwork with vibration energy and potency.

**Goddess Worship and Shakti:** *Tantra* places a strong emphasis on the worship of the divine feminine principle, known as *Shakti*, as the creative force of the universe. *Kohbar* art often features depictions of goddesses such as *Durga*, *Kali*, or *Lakshmi*, embodying various aspects of *Shakti*. The portrayal of goddesses in *Kohbar* art invokes blessings for empowerment, protection, and abundance, drawing upon Tantric teachings of divine feminine energy and its transformative potential as highlighted by Archer (1949).

**Ritualistic Practices and Yantra Puja:** *Tantra* emphasizes ritualistic *puja* i.e. practices as a means of connecting with divine energies and invoking their blessings. *Yantra Puja*, the worship of *Yantras*, is a common Tantric practice performed to harness cosmic energies and fulfill spiritual goals. *Kohbar* art may be used as a focal point for *Yantra Puja*, with practitioners meditating upon the sacred symbols and visual representations to deepen their spiritual connection and receive blessings.

**Subtle Energy and Chakra Activation:** *Tantra* views the human body as a microcosm of the universe, with subtle energy centers known as Chakras that govern physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. *Kohbar* art may incorporate subtle energy patterns and Chakra symbolism, facilitating energetic healing and balance. Dulal, KC, & Singh (2023) have documented this concept, noting its representation in Mithila art. The visual representation of Chakras and subtle energy channels in *Kohbar* art serves as a catalyst for Chakra activation and spiritual awakening, aligning the practitioner with higher states of consciousness and spiritual evolution.



*Note.* Krishna Radha romance by NupurNishith, Sretrieved from <https://www.creativemithila.com>

Overall, the influence of *Tantra* in *Kohbar* art adds layers of spiritual depth and transformative power, enriching its symbolic meanings and cultural significance within the *Mithila* community. Through the integration of sacred symbols, mantras, goddess worship, ritualistic practices, and subtle energy principles, *Kohbar* art becomes not only a visual expression of cultural traditions but also a potent tool for spiritual growth and enlightenment.

#### ***Using Materials, Tools and Techniques***

Based on the research and literature review, *Mithila* art is created on handcrafted cotton fabrics and *Lokta* papers. Researchers, including Archer (1949), Thakur (1956), Vequaud (1977), and Jain (1997), have documented that acrylic paints and contemporary brushes are used to create these works of art. According to researchers including Chaudhary (1976) and Jha (1983) prominent colours include pink, parrot green, red, copper blue, sulphate blue, yellow and dark blue. Double borders and a black outline are compulsory. The colours were derived from natural sources like plants, charcoal soot, ochre etc. Black colour was obtained by mixing soot with cow dung while yellow colour was made by mixing turmeric, pollen or lime with the milk of banyan leaves. Red colour was derived from the *Kusum* flower juice or red sandalwood. Meanwhile, leaves of

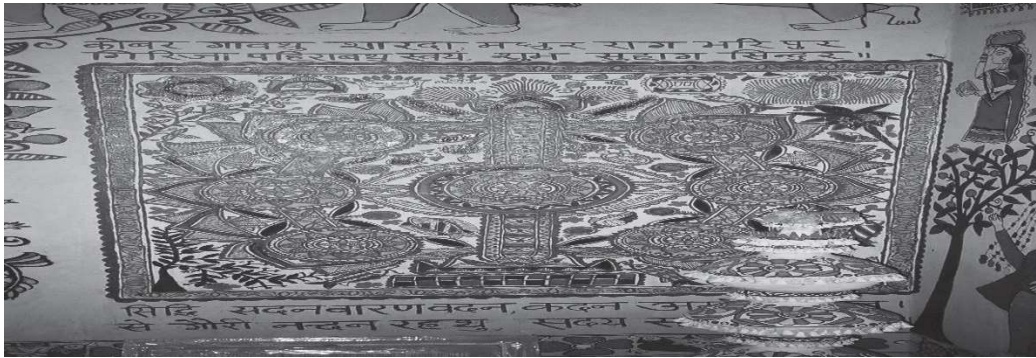
apple trees were used to obtain green colour, rice powder for white colour and *palasha* flowers were used to get orange colour.

According to Dulal, KC, and Singh (2023), and our field observations, bold lines, vivid colors, and intricate patterns are characteristics of the artistic style of *Kohbar* painting. Natural paints and brushes made of bamboo sticks are frequently used in their execution. *Kohbar* art is characterized by its vibrant colors, bold lines, and intricate patterns, often depicting a wide range of symbolic motifs. Traditional materials such as handmade paper or cloth serve as the canvas for *Kohbar* paintings, providing a textured surface that enhances the richness and depth of colors. Traditionally, these paintings were done with fingers or using twigs, brushes, nib pens, and matchsticks on freshly plastered mud walls of huts as described by Rana (2021) and others. Now, these are also done on cloth, hand-made paper, wood and canvas.

### **Folk Artists and Craftsmanship**

*Kohbar* art is traditionally practiced by women and is closely associated with auspicious occasions such as weddings, and other ceremonial events within the *Mithila* community. The creation of *Kohbar* art involves the skilled craftsmanship of folk artists within the *Mithila* community. These artists, often women, possess a deep understanding of traditional techniques, motifs, and cultural symbolism associated with *Kohbar* art. It is often passed down through generations within families, with techniques and motifs inherited and taught from mothers to daughters. Folk artists learn the art of *Kohbar* painting from a young age, observing elders and practicing traditional techniques to hone their skills over time. Folk artists possess a deep knowledge of symbolic motifs and cultural imagery associated with *Kohbar* art, drawing inspiration from Hindu mythology,

folklore, and everyday life in the *Mithila* region.



*Note.* Kayastha wall painting (Kohbar) retrieved from <https://medium.com>

Folk artists share techniques, motifs, and cultural knowledge with one another, fostering a sense of camaraderie and cultural continuity within the community. While rooted in tradition, folk artists also demonstrate a willingness to innovate and adapt *Kohbar* art to contemporary contexts, experimenting with new themes, styles, and mediums to ensure its relevance in today's world. Overall, the craftsmanship of folk artists is central to the creation and preservation of *Kohbar* art, ensuring that this vibrant artistic tradition continues to thrive within the *Mithila* community for generations to come.

### **Kohbar Painting as an Intangible Cultural Heritage**

On the basis of structures, cultural heritage can be classified into tangible and intangible forms. Tangible cultural heritage have physical appearance whereas; intangible culture cannot be seen in the form of materials. It can only be observed by the inner feelings of human beings. The UNESCO convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage 2003 classified intangible cultural heritage in five different domains which are oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship (UNESCO, 2003, p. 8). What the UNESCO classified all domains are their own specific



significance and features, which are known as the fundamental tools of establishing indigenous identity of the owner groups and communities as well. Out of the five domains, art, painting and making skill can be categorized under the traditional craftsmanship.

By examining the above mentioned different aspects such as folk tales and legends, beliefs associate with this folk art, tantric influence, folk artists and craftsmanship, using materials, tools and techniques researchers can conclude to the *Kohbar* art as an intangible cultural heritage of *Mithila* region. It provides social and historical contexts, enriching our understanding of its significance within the *Mithila* community in Nepal. Finally, by incorporating the meaning and types of intangible cultural heritage prescribed by UNESCO (<https://ich.unesco.org/>), scholars can critically analyze and interpret *Kohbar* art within broader intangible cultural heritage of *Mithila* community in Nepal.

### Conclusion

The findings highlight the intricate symbols adjoined with the *Kohbar* painting artistic craftsmanship, and ritualistic significance embedded within *Kohbar* painting, underscoring its role in conveying blessings, fostering community cohesion, and celebrating life's milestones. *Mithila* culture is not only limited to historical stories, beliefs, arts and crafts but also depicts a different life style with its unique features, rites and cultures which are expressed by all the big and small activities performed everyday by the people. Not only daily activities but whole life process of a person also expresses the rituals and culture of the *Mithila* and describes how community functions. People are forgetting these things with the modern lifestyle.

It is necessary to preserve *Mithila* painting from disappearing as it is an indigenous art and carries cultural background of Maithili people. The resilience, creativity, and cultural vitality of the *Mithila* community is reflected in the timeless beauty and enduring legacy of *Kohbar* painting. By honoring and

celebrating this vibrant artistic tradition, one can forge stronger connections between past, present, and future generations, ensuring that *Kohbar* art continues to inspire and enrich lives for years to come.

### **Implications**

The implications of findings extend beyond academic discourse to encompass broader socio-cultural, economic, and policy dimensions. Researchers call for concerted efforts to preserve, promote, and sustain *Kohbar* art as a vital component of *Mithila* cultural heritage, through initiatives such as educational outreach, community empowerment, and policy support. Looking ahead, future research should explore interdisciplinary approaches, comparative studies, and participatory methodologies to deepen the understanding of *Kohbar* art's cultural significance and socio-economic implications.

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