



E-ISSN: 2789-1615
P-ISSN: 2789-1607
Impact Factor: 5.69
IJLE 2022; 2(1): 37-43
www.educationjournal.info
Received: 19-11-2021
Accepted: 22-12-2021

Dr. Suprita Jha
Associate Professor,
Department of English,
Mata Sundri College,
University of Delhi,
New Delhi, India

Mithilanchal or the land of Sita: A forgotten rich cultural heritage

Dr. Suprita Jha

Abstract

India has been a diverse country for ages. It holds several religions, castes, cultures, and languages. One of the most influencing Indian cultures is "Mithilanchal". Mithila or Maithil culture refers to the culture which originated in the Mithila region. Mithila is an ancient cultural region of South Nepal and North India lying between the lower ranges of the Himalayas and the Ganges River. The Nepal border cuts across the top fringe of this region. The area is covered by Mithila is Darbhanga, Kosi, Purnia, Santhal Pargana, Bhagalpur, Munger of India, and some districts of Nepal. It is surrounded by the Himalayan range in the north, by the river Kosi in the East, Ganga in the South, and Gandaki in the west.

Mithila is the birthplace of Sita, the beautiful daughter of King Janaka and heroine of the epic, THE RAMAYANA. The culture is famous for its songs, dance, headgear (Paag), festivals, Madhubani Paintings, cuisine, and most importantly, the life which was spent by Buddha and Mahavir. Both Mahavir and Buddha have lived and discoursed in Mithila. There is something sacred in the air that is impacting every aspect of life in Mithilanchal. Mithila region has always been a source of pride for all living in the state or outside for its Mithila painting, preserved heritage such as aripan (a variation of Rangoli) and murals. Above all, Mithilanchal is also called the land of scholars and great educationists. The great Maithili poet Vidyapati and his writings are the source of inspiration for so many other writers. A collection of hundreds of his poems titled the Padavalli is still the source for the most romantic poetry describing the love between Krishna (the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu) and Radha. The present paper proposes to highlight some of the grand characteristics of Mithila Culture which are about to diminish in the flash of Modernity.

Keywords: Mithila, great, tradition, folk, education, songs, Madhubani painting, community, language

Introduction

Though not a very large region, Mithilanchal has a very distinctive place in Indian culture because of its rich cultural heritage and glorious history. Mithila, also called Mithilanchal, is a geographical and cultural region located in the Indian Continent. It comprises certain parts of north Bihar of India and adjoining districts of the eastern Terai of Nepal. The Nepal border cuts across the top fringe of this region. The Gandak and Kosi Rivers are rough western and eastern boundaries of Mithila. The native language is known as Maithili and its speakers are referred to as Maithils. The majority of the Mithila region falls within modern-day India, more specifically in the state of Bihar. Mithila is bounded in the north by the Himalayas, and in the south, west and east by the Ganges, Gandaki and Mahananda respectively. It extends into the southeastern Terai of Nepal. This region was also called Tirabhukti, the ancient name of Tirhut. The Ramayana records a dynastic marriage between Prince Rama of Ayodhya and Sita, the daughter of Raja Janak of Mithila.

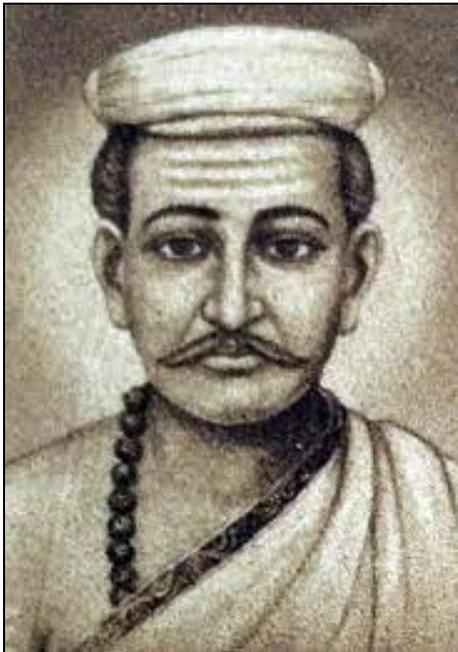
The name Mithila is believed to be derived from the King Mithi. He established Mithilapuri. Since he was born out of the body of his father, he was called Janaka. After this, the later kings of Mithila adopted the title Janaka. The most famous Janaka was Seeradhwaaja Janaka, father of Sita. There were 52 kings in the dynasty of Janaka. The region was also known as Videha. The kingdom of Videha is mentioned for the first time in Yajurveda Samhita. Mithila, is mentioned in Buddhist Jatakas, the Brahmanas, the Puranas (described in detail in Brhadvisnu Purana) and various epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Mithila is also called a land of educated people. Generally it is said that the people of this area are very friendly, courteous, sophisticated and well-learned. The ancient great poet Vidyapati belonged to this region only. Many educationists like Harimohan Jha, Chanda Jha, Jaymant Mishra, Ganganath Jha, Amarnath Jha and Mohan Jha belonged to this area who continued the legacy of the Kavi - Kokil Vidyapati.

Correspondence
Dr. Suprita Jha
Associate Professor,
Department of English,
Mata Sundri College,
University of Delhi,
New Delhi, India

This culture is also very famous for its varieties of foods and the hospitality towards the guests. Having all the advancement and education, still the people of this culture are very much connected to their roots and they believe quite firmly in their tradition and folk culture. It's very difficult indeed to frame such a vivid and vast culture in a compact and concise form but still some of the most important and integral components of this culture can be pictured here to bring out the grandeur and glory of Mithila Culture.

Kavi- Kokil Vidyapati

Vidyapati, in full Vidyapati Thakur was born in c. 1352 in Bisapi village in Madhubani district in Bihar state. He was a great writer and poet, known for his many erudite Sanskrit works and also for his erotic poetry written in the Maithili language. He was the first writer to use Maithili as a literary language. Apart from writing songs, Vidyapati also wrote books on ethics, history, geography and law. Among his books are Puruspariksa (moral teaching), Likhanabali (on mithila writing), Kirttilata (history), Bhu-Parikrama (geography), Danbakyabali (on charity), Gabgabakyabali (on sites). Durgabhaktitarabgini and Bibhagsar are autobiographical in nature. The most popular among his writing are THE PADAVALIS in which he has expressed the eternal love relationship of Lord Krishna and RADHA. Still today the songs written by Vidyapati are sung in every home of Mithilanchal.



Paag

The Paag is a headdress native to the Mithila region worn by Maithil people. It is a symbol of honour and respect and a significant part of the Maithil culture. Paag dates back to prehistoric times when it was produced from the leaves of plants. It remains in an altered form today. The Paag is worn by the entire Maithil family. Paag's color also holds a great deal of significance. The red Paag is worn by the bridegroom and those who go through the sacred rituals of the thread. Mithila paag can be worn on almost every occasion. Mithila Paag is especially Known as the pride of Mithila and made of cotton, Satan, and silk. This cap can be

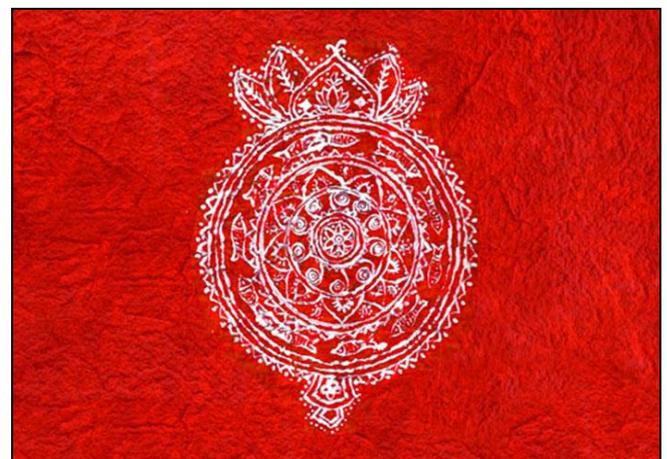
worn by everyone. Traditionally the people wear Khakhi coloured Paag but on certain specific occasions the colour can be changed symbolically.



Aripan

Aripan is a variation of Rangoli, practiced in Mithilanchal. The Aripan floor painting is derived from the Sanskrit word Alepan (meaning - to smear). It refers to smearing the ground with cow dung and clay for the purpose of purification. Initially, Aripan designs were made as an offering to appease the Gods to make the cultivable land fertile and fruitful. However, in the present day, it has become a part of the numerous day to day ceremonies and rituals. Aripan is drawn, both for adornment and purification.

The origin of the art is shrouded in mystery. It is generally believed that it was created during the epic period when King Janak of Mithila ordered the marriage hall to be decorated for his daughter Sita's marriage to Lord Rama. Some vivid descriptions of these wall and floor paintings are present in Tulsidas's Ramcharitamanas.. Originally this art was created only on freshly plastered mud walls and floors of huts. But now they are done on cloth, hand-made paper and canvas too. While creating the Aripan, brushes are not used but, nimble fingers are used to make these delicate designs..



To create an Aripan a paste of powdered rice and water, known as "pithar" is prepared. The women dip two fingers into the pithar, and by graceful and deft movements produce beautiful, geometrical patterns on the mud floor of their homes and courtyards. These patterns also include different

design elements integrated into them. This art is a thanksgiving to the mother goddess Earth. In order to adorn the creations more, the women also smear red powder at certain places; this enhances the created Aripan. Along with the pithar locally available raw materials are used specially for generating colours. Vermillion and local red clay for red; turmeric and flower petals for yellow; leaves for green; soot for black and crushed berries for blue, are used to adorn the Aripans. Aripans usually comprise of line drawings, illustrated on the floor of the house. Aripan patterns are a part of each and every auspicious ceremony in Mithila, be it a puja, a vrata (fast) or a samskara (mundan-tonsuring ceremony, vivah-marriage, yajnopavita-thread ceremony, etc). On the eve of a ceremony, the courtyard is decorated with the Aripan designs at the front entrance or threshold to the home, and a number of other places inside the home. Any ceremony or ritual is considered incomplete without this traditional art form adorning the ground. Both old and young women practise this particular art form.



Saama Chakeba

Saama Chakeba is a Hindu festival, originating from the Mithila region. It is a festival of brothers and sisters. It is celebrated in November and commences when birds begin their migration from the Himalayas down towards the plains of India. The festival, which includes folk theater and song, celebrates the love between brothers and sisters and is based on a legend recounted in the Puranas. It tells the story of Saama, a daughter of Krishna who had been falsely accused of wrongdoing. Her father punished her by turning her into a bird, but the love and sacrifice of her brother Chakeba eventually allowed her to regain human form. The celebration starts from the night of Chhath puja. This is the 7th day of the month of Kartik. Young, mostly unmarried girls assemble near the ghats of chhath with a basket containing small idols of sama and chakeva, candles, kohl, clay made daily use appliances etc. at night. They sing traditional songs, perform some rituals, like making kohl, exchanging baskets. This celebration continues till Kartik Purnima. On the auspicious occasion of Kartik Purnima, girls take a dip in river and the idols of Saama and Chakeba are immersed in the river. The main essence of this folk festival is the love between a brother and his sister. How the brother was ready to sacrifice everything to protect his sister! Even now a days the sisters celebrate and worship their brothers by offering delicious food and with other rituals to venerate them.



Jat Jatin dance

Jat Jatin dance is the most popular folk dance of North Bihar, namely in Mithila and Koshi region. This dance genre is unique in its depiction of a married couple's sensitive love and dispute. Generally, it is performed in a couple on moonlit nights in monsoons. The original theme of the dance explains the story of the lover's Jat and Jatin, who were separated and lived in tough surroundings, is told in the original theme of the Jat-Jatin dance. From midnight to morning, grown-up girls and young housewives assemble in the courtyard to dance to the beat of a drum. It is usually done by two people. Other concern topics like poverty, sorrow, love, "Tu tu main main between lovers/husbands & wives", all find their expression through this dance. In some versions, while performing the dance, the dancers wear masks to add a reality picture.

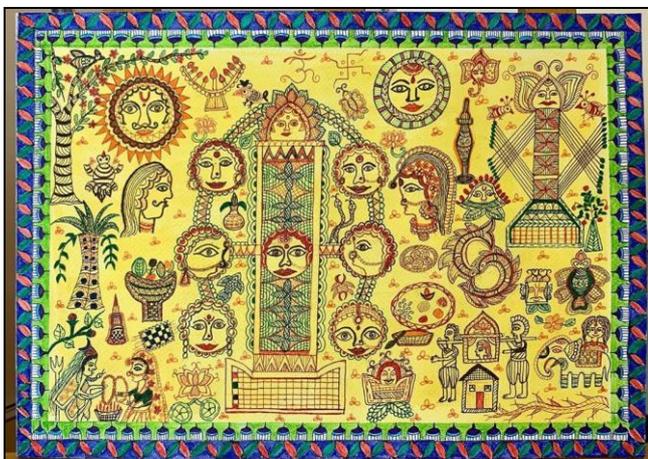
The Jat-Jatin dance is simple and consists of delicate body movements. With four steps forward and an equal amount back, the steps are lively and vigorous. The foot patterns aren't particularly detailed, but the limb movements are lovely. Dadra, Teevta, and Kerwa rhythms are kept to six, seven, or eight beats.



Kohbar Ghar

This is one of the most significant marriage rituals of wall painting in Mithila region, primarily done on the occasion of marriage. Traditionally, it has been a woman's preserve. With modern times the medium of art shifted to canvas, and on rare occasions to cloth. Depicted here is one of the most popular and iconic of these ritual paintings called the 'kohbar' or the 'puren'.

These were originally painted in the 'kohbar ghar' or the nuptial chamber where the bride and groom consummate their marriage. This room in which the married couple spends their first four nights is the most vibrantly painted section of the house. Renditions of kohbar as named by the Kayasthas usually showcase faces inside the rings of the lotuses. A long vertical object that pierces through the central ring of the lotus also appears, and at the top end of this vertical object a face similar to that of the rings is seen. This object is meant to represent the stem which roots the lotus leaves at the bottom of the pond. The lotus is symbolic of a woman's fertility, a symbol of plenty adopted from the many local ponds covered with such flowers from edge to edge in the monsoon. The pond becomes a source for other symbols of plenty as well like fish, a symbol of fertility, the tortoise, a symbol of love, and snakes, symbols of divinity. They appear in and around the composition of kohbar, visible in this painting as well. In several instances, the moon, sun and other idols are drawn nearby; these are described as witnesses to the act of marriage. As wall paintings the rendition of puren would be surrounded with paintings of deities, who too serve as witnesses to the auspicious event of the first night of marriage. The image of Durga would find the centre stage in the kohbar ghar.



Mithila Makhana or Makhana

Mithila Makhana or Makhana is a special type of aquatic plant fox nut cultivated in Mithila region of Bihar and Nepal. Mithila area of North Bihar and Nepali Mithila region are known for being a site of its original cultivation over centuries. Bihar Agricultural University, Sabour provided Mithila Makhana GI tagging for the fox nut of

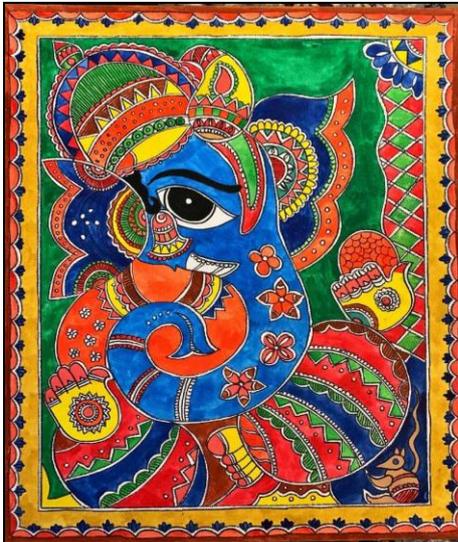
Mithila. Makhana is the one of the three prestigious cultural identities of Mithila. Pan, Makhana and Machh (fish) are the three prestigious cultural identities of Mithila. Step by step there are ponds, fishes, and Makhana which mark the region's cultural identity and Maithili pride. In Mithila, Makhana is also termed as Makhana. Makhana contains protein and fiber, along with micronutrients like calcium, magnesium, iron, and phosphorus. Postal Department of India started courier service to provide Mithila Makhana to everyone in India from 28th January of 2021. A survey on the ethnic uses of Makhana in Mithila and other parts of India has revealed its about a dozen distinct uses. These include its specific association with (i) 'Kojagaraa' (a marital ritual) (ii) 'Parikramaa' (for maintaining counts during ritualistic circumambulation around a temple or tree) (iii) 'Shraaddha Karma' (last Hindu rites) (iv) Devotional offering to deities or distinguished persons in the form of non-flower garlands (v) 'Prasaad' (edible offering to deities) (vi) Sacred thread 'Yajnopaveet' as stiffening item (vii) 'Makhaan Paagal' i.e., caramelised pops (during Navratri and other festivals). It is used as a 'Havan Saamagri' and as a component of 'Panchamevaa' (i.e., five auspicious dry fruits). 'Ghunes', a head gear ceremonially worn by the bridegroom in Mithilanchal on the occasion of wedding has streams of Makhana pops hanging downward. This practice is observed by the Srotriyas in this area.

Madhubani Painting

Madhubani Painting is one of the many famous Indian art forms. As it is practiced in the Mithila region of Bihar and Nepal, it is called Mithila or Madhubani Art. Often characterised by complex geometrical patterns, these paintings are known for representing ritual content for particular occasions, including festivals, religious rituals etc. There are three main themes in Madhubani art: religion, social scenes and elements of nature. Hindu mythological figures and scenes from sacred texts are very common subjects, featuring popular deities like Radha and Krishna, Shiva, Ganesha, Saraswati and Laxmi. The colours used in Madhubani Paintings are usually derived from plants and other natural sources. These colours are often bright and pigments like lampblack and ochre are used to create black and brown respectively. Instead of contemporary brushes, objects like twigs, matchsticks and even fingers are used to create paintings.

Some of the initial references to the Madhubani paintings can be found in the Hindu epic The Ramayana, when King Janaka, Sita's father, asks his painters to create Madhubani paintings for his daughter's wedding. Over time, Madhubani paintings became a part of festivities and special events like weddings. Slowly, this art attracts connoisseurs of art as many contemporary Indian artists took the art on global stage. The art not only depicts the social structure but also the cultural identity of the land with its depictions on themes of religion, love and fertility. Interestingly, it took an Englishman to introduce Madhubani to the Indians and the rest of the world. As history has it, in 1934, the state of Bihar suffered from a massive earthquake. A British officer, Willain Archer, was inspecting the damage caused by the quake in Madhubani district when he chanced upon the paintings on the interior walls of the dilapidated homes. He took some of the earliest known photos of the works in black and white. Later in 1949 he published an article on the paintings in the Indian art journal, Marg, which brought the

paintings into the public eye. Later, Archer was to become the South Asia Curator at London's Victoria and Albert Museum. It took another natural disaster, a severe drought in the 1960s, that inspired the transition of the paintings from the walls of the homes onto paper, when the All India Handicrafts Board encouraged the women to create these paintings for sale. The Madhubani paintings are not just pretty and colorful additions to a home or office. For those who choose to explore them and read deeper into these amazing works will be well rewarded with a wonderful and amazing insight into the rich thoughts of these simple people.



Maithli Cuisine

Food has always been the epitome of any region. Food has always been the identification of any culture. And when we are talking about Mithila, it will be injustice if we will move forward without adding the flavours of food in our plate of talks about Mithila. Some food has similarities with Bengali food and North Indian food but preparation and taste is entirely different. The Maithil plate includes rice, wheat, fish and sweet dishes in which use of various spices, herbs and natural edibles are attention seekers. Here recipes are decided per the events. Maithil cuisine comprises a broad repertoire of rice, wheat, fish and meat dishes and the use of various spices, herbs and natural edibles. The cuisine is

categorized by types of food for various events, from banquets, to weddings and parties, festival foods, and travel foods. Some traditional Maithli dishes are: Dahi- Chura, Vegetable of Arikanch, Kadhi bari, Ghoogni, Tarua, Badee, Maachh (fish), Kachari, Pyaaji.

Dahi-Chura

Talking about a common day in Mithila. The day starts with 'Dahi -Chura' as the breakfast. It is basically curd with flattened rice. Sugar or salt is also taken to add an additional flavour to it. Some people eat green chilli and mango pickle with this breakfast too. Dahi- Chura is considered as the most comfortable meal and one of the favourite of the people of Mithila. It is served as a food of fest too, specially in 'Brahman - bhojan'. It is a group of people from Brahman community who are invited to attend the fest for any auspicious event. In Makar Sankranti Dahi- Chura has a different charm here, people must eat it. They consider it as a symbol of celebrating their culture. Dahi -Chura is their favorite and there is one more reason behind it. It is portable as people take it as a journey meal while travelling too.



Moving forward to the lunch time, people of Mithila take rice, pulse, vegetables and other different local varieties of food. There are various pulses and vegetables that they take and they have their own styles of cooking and serving. In evening time, people take spicy snacks which are made of nutritious ingredients with flavouring tastes. At the dinner time, chapati with any vegetable is very common in Mithila houses. Weather and climate influence food and eating habits and Mithila is also following the same rule. There are some foods which are related to some specific festivals only, some foods specify for the specific people only and there are many more foods which have their special connection with the place. Maithil cuisine is completely locally developed and has little impact of outside people and cultures. The Maithil cooking style is very traditional. It follows seasonal food cycle which is prescribed in Ayurveda. The Mithila region remains isolated during Mughal and British era too so there is no much interruption in the flavours and style. The food and cuisine is in its original form. This is the speciality of this region.

People of Mithila are very much fond of non-vegetarian foods. In which fish is something like the heart of foods of Mithila. Localites call it 'Maachh'. Not only its name, the cooking style of fish is also different here. It is cooked in mustered oil, Fried fish is prepared first then puri is prepared which is made up of mustard paste, garlic, onion

and tomato in which fried fish has been dipped and at last the whole recipe is garnished with coriander leaves. The local spices add the different flavour in the fish. Fish is eaten as a curry with rice or chapati and as a fry too with fried spicy flattened rice (chura – bhujia). The people are so much obsessed with the fish because it has its cultural importance. In some of their local festivals and marriage ceremony fish is regarded as an auspicious asset. Rohu fish fry is presented to guests just like someone serve sweets to people in other culture. There is a local proverb which is very famous here. "Maachh, Paan aur Makhaan, e teen ta aichh Mithila ke jaan". (Fish, Betel and water-lily seeds are the most special delicacies of Mithila). Other than fish, people also eat Mutton (goat), fowl like pigeons, ducks and quails. Aquatic creatures have also been in their plates and they are snails, turtles, crabs, shrimps and oysters. All are cooked in local styles. Chicken and eggs are not part of Maithili culture and people have started eating these in the last 3-4 decades.



Maachh

Vegetables are the major part of the plates of People of Mithila. Baigan- adauri is one of them. It is prepared with brinjal and Urad daal dumplings. Adauri (Urad daal dumplings) is something exclusive to Mithila. Arikanchan Tarkari (colocasia leaves) is also the part of vegetables in Mithila. It is prepared as fish curry. Kadhi- Bari is prepared by gram flour, curd and spices and is something like one of the special foods of Mithila. In fest or community food this is served. This is cooked specially for the guests of the house.



Kadhi-badi

Tarua (fritters) are the tiny sliced vegetables or vegetables' leaves coated with rice batter and are deep fried. It is believed that it is impossible to welcome the guest without serving tarua. There are many varieties of it, some of them are: Tilkor (leaf of a local climber), kadima (Pumpkin), Ol (Elephant foot yam), kumhar (ash gourd), Khamharua (Dioscorea Satiea). These are the special fritters pat from them, any vegetable like potato, cauliflower, brinjal is used in making Tarua.



Sweets and Desserts

The food cannot be felt completed without having sweet dishes at the end. Some of the common interesting desserts of Mithilanchal are as follows:

1. Anarsa-pastry like snack, eaten during Diwali, prepared with jaggery, rice, poppy seed, ghee (clarified butter)
2. Thekua-Biscuit like snack, prepared by wheat, sugar, dry fruits, ghee. A special food of Chhath puja.
3. Pidikiya- A kind of snack Prepared by maida, sugar, sooji. Prime food of festivals.
4. Khaja, Balushahi, Laddoo, Malpua, pochua pu, sakarapara, pantoa, makhana kheer, sakrauri. These are some more sweetdish enjoyed by the people of Mithila.
5. Bagiya-It is known as the delicacy of the Maithil. It is steamed dumpling that consists of an external covering of rice flour and an inner content of sweet substances such like chaku (concentrated sugarcane juice + jaggery+ ghee+ nuts). Vegetables, pulses and other fried items are also filled. It is normally eaten in winters.

6. Dahi-Cheeni (king of desserts)- A maithil can eat an elephant and still have some place in stomach for a plateful of dahi cheeni.

Finally, it can be said about Mithila that as the Maithli people like to eat sweet more, in the same manner, the people are equally sweet there and of course, the language Maithli, is one of the sweetest languages of India. One should feel proud to be a part of such great and rich culture.



References

1. Mithila ki Lok Chitrakala- Awadesh Aman
2. Mithila Chitra Kor- Krishna Kumar
3. Dr. Rai A. Toxicity of heavy metals in the water quality of Ganga River in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India. Int. J Adv. Chem. Res. 2020;2(1):01-04. DOI: 10.33545/26646781.2020.v2.i1a.14
4. Cultural Renaissance in Mithilanchal: Aspirations take Wings-Sajjan Singh Thakur
5. Revisiting Mithila- Dr. R.D. Prasad