

# Madhuban Papier Mache



Compiled By



**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF  
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## **Acknowledgment**

On the behalf of Indian Institute of Crafts and Design we would like to the mastercraftman Mrs. SUBHADRA DEVI who shared her valuable experiences with us. We would also like to thank Mrs. Kamini Kaushal, another dignified artisan of this craft of the same village, now practising in Madhubani, who gave us information regarding recent trends and changes happening in this craft and other fellow artisans of that village working to keep this craft alive and put it on a way of success and fame.

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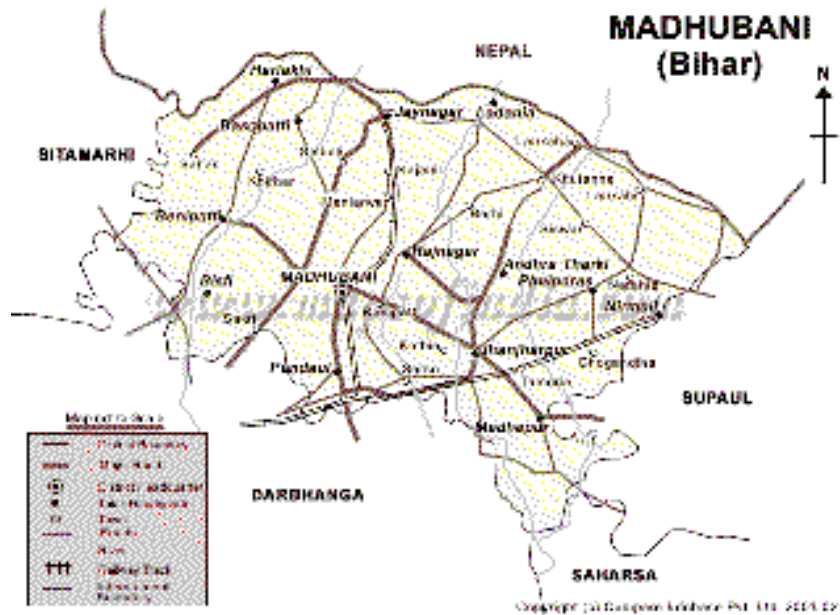
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## Location of the Craft Cluster

We visited village Salempur for the documentation of Madhubani Papier Mache. This village is situated 4km. before Madhubani on National highway between Darbhanga and Madhubani. To reach Salempur 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.



# Madhubani Papier Mache

Madhubani can be described as a craft city where number of crafts were born and nurtured. Some of the main crafts of this place are Madhubani Painting, Madhubani Papier Mache, Sikki craft, and Sujani Embroidery. Madhubani Papier Mache, a craft where waste paper is used to make utility and decorative items is very different from other craft of this region. The proud mother of this craft is “*Subhadra Devi*”, a living legend. She was practicing this craft since the age of 15 and was honored for this craft with State award in 1980 and with national award in 1992. Initially it was done in clay but because clay is very delicate and easily breakable so on the advice of DCH *Subhadra Devi* started doing with paper pulp. Initially they use to make decorative items which were very colorful, eco-friendly and unbreakable and use to make traditional motifs like *Kohbar*, elephant. Utility items are very useful for household purposes and because they are eco-friendly in nature they are very safe to use like they use to make containers to keep food grains. Due to her struggle and initiatives papier mache of this region is getting national and international appraisal.

## Difference between Kashmir and Madhubani Papier Mache-

### KASHMIR PAPIER MACHE

This craft is found only in the Kashmir district and is practiced only by the Shia Muslim community. It was used for ornamenting smooth surfaces made of paper pulp or layers of polished paper.

#### *Characteristics of Kashmir Papier Mache-*

\* Kashmir papier mache is actually the technique of surface decoration rather than the creation of the body of the object.

\* The crafts persons of this craft use wooden or clay moulds of all the product prototypes but now they procure the moulds made of wood and brass.

\* In this craft there are two separate groups of people, one who make the objects and other group who paint it. *Sakta* is that group of people who make papier mache objects out of pulp and sell their objects to the *Naqqash*, the papier mache painters.

\* Motifs range from depictions of along with geometrical patterns- especially as borders, to the depiction of natural history of Kashmir, representation of snow-capped peaks and hunting scenes with Rajas mounted on horses are predominant.

\* Box is the ubiquitous papier mache product but a new varied product range is also available. Letter racks, candle stands, coasters, small bowls, trays and jars are commonly made and sold daily use products, in ornamental products small bells and chimes in an array of colors also sell well.



*Papier Mache Bells*



*Papier Mache Box*

## MADHUBANI PAPIER MACHE

Like Kashmir Papier Mache Madhubani papier mache is also found only in the Madhubani district of Bihar and this craft is mainly performed by the *Kayastha* caste of village 'Salempur' where this craft was born and nurtured, now it's done in other parts of Madhubani also. Objects are made out of paper pulp and only painted from outside with the motifs inspired from Madhubani painting



### *Papier Mache dolls*

#### ***Characteristics of Madhubani Papier Mache***

- \* In Madhubani Papier Mache creation of the object is more important than its surface ornamentation. They concentrate more on the form and paint it to make it look more attractive.
- \* All the objects made by the artisans are totally handmade. They don't use any types of moulds in the process of object making, this is the reason because of which we rarely find any type of similarity among the products made by them, there has to be some degree of diversity even among the same kind of product range.
- \* The entire product is made by an artisan. Starting from thinking of the concept to the final process of painting the product all is done if possible by the same artisan. There are no separate groups to perform different tasks.
- \* In Madhubani Papier Mache most of the motifs are from Madhubani painting like elephant, Kohbar Ghar for decoration purposes and when they do painting on the objects also they paint trees, human faces that we can see in those paintings.
- \* They usually make utilitarian as well as ornamental products right from the beginning now they have started making products like bangles, stands, mobile covers and products according to the market demands.

### **Raw Material used-**

Raw materials used in this craft are easily available at home and at local market. Required materials for this craft are:

- \* Newspaper or any other waste paper- The basic raw material for this craft which is used to prepare paper pulp, newspaper or any other waste paper can be use
- \* *Multani Mitti* or *Dard Maida*- Initially *Dard Maida* Was used, leaves of a plant, to provide strength to the



*Raw Material used in the process of making Products*

product and to stick paper pulp but now *Multani Mitti* is used as it gives a better finish to the products.

- \* *Methi* Powder- It is used for fragrance and methi powder helps in keeping it safe from moths and other insects.
- \* *Fevicol* or any other adhesive- It is mixed in paper pulp for sticking it.

## RAW MATERIAL COST PER UNIT-

8-10 Rs. per kg. Paper

4-5 Rs. Fevicol

10 Rs. Per kg. *Multani Mitti* + *Methi Powder*

## Tools Used-

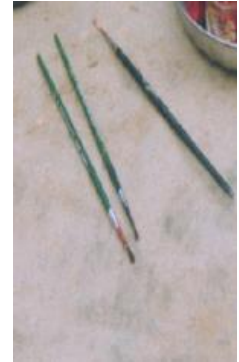
Basically it is a handmade product so machinery and other equipments in its manufacturing are not required only some household tools are needed -

\* *Khal Musal* or Stone Slab and Wooden Hammer- It is used for crushing paper and for preparing paper pulp.

\* Brushes- For painting 00 brushes for Coloring, 000 for writing.



*Khal-Musal*



*Brushes*

## PROCESS-

- Firstly paper is soaked in the water for about 1 week for fragmentation.
- After it is properly fragmented then it is crushed in *Khal- Musal* or beaten up by hammer to make a paste of it. Finer the paper pulp better the finishing.
- Along with this *Multani Mitti*, which is required for giving better finish and strength, to the products is also soaked in water for 24 hrs. at least.
- Then a mixture is prepared of all these ingredients Paper, *Multani Mitti*, *Methi Powder* and Fevicol.
- When the mixture is ready then different shapes and forms are given on the basis of imaginations by hands only without the help of any moulds.
- After the products are prepared they are left for drying in the sun.
- Once dried completely then colors are applied on the products.



*Mixture of paper pulp, multani mitti, methi powder and fevicol, products made out of it and final products after coloring*

## About Natural Colors-

Initially only natural colors were used for painting. Natural colors were made with the help of different leaves and petals. Mainly following



colours are used and they are collected from the following natural source-

- Pink- Rose Petals
- Brick Red - *Gaur*
- Saffron- *Har-Singar*
- Blue- *Sikkat*
- Green- *Sem* leaves (French Beans)
- Brown- *Mehendi*
- Yellow- *Litchi* leaves or turmeric
- Black- Carbon (soot)

*Sources of natural colors and poster color*

But now because consumers taste are changing so the artisans have started using fabric and poster colors in place of natural colors because they are more bright and stable.

### **Range of products-**

Initially traditional motifs were used to make products so decorative items and products for household utility dominated the production like-

- \* *Palki*
- \* *Kothi*- Container to store food grains
- \* Small containers- To store dry products and food grains also.

Traditional Motifs-

\* *Kohbar*- It's a hut shaped form. Presence of this motif is very important at the time of marriages in Bihar.

\* *Bar-Kanai* (Bride and Bridegroom)

\* *Hathi Jannak Dala* (Elephant)

But with the change in consumer taste and demand they started making decorative as well as utility products for daily use.



*Decorative as well as utilitarian products*

### **DECORATIVE PRODUCTS**

It includes Wall Hangings, Masks, flower vase, Photo Frames apart from the traditional motifs.





### UTILITY PRODUCTS

Pencil tops Sharpener cover, Pendants, Earrings, Mobile holders, Mirror stands, Pen stands, Bangles and Bangle boxes, necklaces as well as household utility products.

PRICE RANGE of these products start from Rs.10- Rs. 500

It means that these products are not only for niche market, ordinary person can also afford it.

One very important fact relevant to this craft is that it is mainly performed by village women. Initially there was least support from other male members of family so the existence of this craft was also in trouble but later it was supported by DCH and hence the craft received worldwide exposure which resulted in an increase in the income of the artisans. Now the women are self dependent and the male members are also assisting them in the marketing of this craft.

Papier Mache products are completely recyclable and storage of this craft is also very convenient Artisans store it inside the house at any safe and dry place. For transportation the artisans use local rickshaw bus and tempo.

### **Marketing and Packaging**

The market of this craft has both national and international demand, because of this design stores, export stores as well as exporters and wholesalers has become an important chain of customers for this craft. But an important fact is that local market has no demand for this craft and the simple reason is that they themselves can easily make it so they don't prefer to buy it from the market.

As this craft is totally practised at household level and the artisans do not possess much excellence in marketing so they are assisted by government agencies like DASTKAR regarding market information and they also invite them to exhibitions and craft fairs, CCIC helps them by placing new orders and establishment of new contacts.

Regarding packaging, initially the artisans use paper to wrap the products, and then they started using poly bags but as poly bags are not eco-friendly and western countries are really aware on these matters so now they have started using paper and cloth bags.

### **Changes in Craft over the years**

#### TECHNOLOGY-

Initially artisans were using painting brushes made out of bamboo but now they are using ready made brushes available in the market as it is much more convenient. Regarding colors,

initially they use only Natural Colors but now they have started using Poster and Fabric colors also as they are more bright and vibrant. In raw materials, *Dard Maida* is replaced by *Multani Mitti* as the latter provides better finish and it is easily accessible also and in the same way *Babool Gum* is replaced by Fevicol.

#### DESIGN-

Design changes are also frequently happening in this field, now the artisans are concentrating more on designs that serve some utility purpose and are able to meet consumer tastes and demand.

#### MARKET-

Now Madhubani papier mache is an international name.

The condition of this craft is improving and products of Madhubani papier machie are also appreciated in the international market along with Kashmir papier machie. There are many institutions that are giving training and arranging workshops in papier machie and are inviting Master Craftsman '*Subhadra ji*' for this.

#### **PROBLEMS FACED BY THE ARTISANS-**

There are some major problems faced by the artisans of this craft-

Firstly, the NGO's which were formed with the objective to upgrade the craft are only serving their own ulterior motives and are least interested in the development and up gradation of the craft and the craft persons. So this is a craft sector where government agencies like DASTKAR, CCIC are performing very well and the artisans are also satisfied with their initiatives.

Secondly, there is lack of skilled artisans in this sector. People start learning this craft and after time without having proper holds of it they start there own work and hence couldn't satisfy the expectations of the consumers and art lovers.

Further, this craft is practised mainly by the women at household level and because of lack of proper support from the male members of the family they couldn't get a hold of the market and sometimes they cannot participate in craft fairs also due to this reason.

## Glossary

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b><i>Kohbar</i></b>           | Auspicious symbol done on the walls of Nuptial Chamber.                             |
| <b><i>Naqqash</i></b>          | Group of Kashmir Papier Mache painters who put colors in the Papier Mache products. |
| <b><i>Sakta</i></b>            | Group of people involved in making Papier Mache products.                           |
| <b><i>Kayastha</i></b>         | An upper caste in North Bihar   |
| <b><i>Multani Mitti</i></b>    | A kind of smooth soil from Multan.  |
| <b><i>Methi</i></b>            | Phonogram. A kind of spice  |
| <b><i>Dard Maida</i></b>       | A kind of plant   |
| <b><i>Khal-Musal</i></b>       | Grinder used for mixing raw material.   |
| <b><i>Gaur</i></b>             | A flower  |
| <b><i>Har Singar</i></b>       | A flower  |
| <b><i>Sikkat</i></b>           | A plant   |
| <b><i>Sem</i></b>              | French Beans  |
| <b><i>Litchi-</i></b>          |   |
| <b><i>Mehendi</i></b>          | <i>Heena</i>  |
| <b><i>Palki</i></b>            | Palanquin   |
| <b><i>Bar Kanai</i></b>        | Bride and Bridegroom in Madhubani Papier Mache                                      |
| <b><i>Kothi</i></b>            | A big container for storing Wheat grains.   |
| <b><i>Hathi Janak Dala</i></b> |   |
|                                | Elephant made in Madhubani Papier Mache   |
| <b><i>Babool</i></b>           | A plant   |

## **Reference**

We collected most of the information about the craft through the Mastercraftman Mrs. Subhadra Devi. Our document on papier Mache is based on the information provided by her.

Mrs.Subhadra Devi  
Village- Salempur  
Via- Pandaul  
District- Madhubani  
BIHAR

Rest of the information like information about Kashmir Papier Mache we gathered it from Website [www.craftrevival.org](http://www.craftrevival.org)

## Interview of the Master Craftsman-

Name- Subhadra Devi

Age - 65

Educational Qualification- Primary

Awards Received - State award in 1980 and  
National award in 1992.

Village- Salempur

District- Madhubani



*Subhadra ji with her National award  
and products made by them*