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Collection of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum

Indian Folk Art

Thu 20 Jul -- Tue 12 Sep 2000 Asia Gallery

III Mithila Painting

In Madhubani district, Bihar, northeastern India, there said to have been Mithila Kingdom in the ancient time. The Mithila painting appeared in the kingdom and has been succeeded among the descendants of the legendary people.

Mithila painting depicts Hindu gods and goddesses, legend, their tribal gods, and animals on the walls and floors of each household at rituals like weddings and funerals wishing for prosperity and abundance. Human being is believed to communicate with the gods through the paintings. The act of painting itself is also a ritual and the painters are believed to be communicating with the gods by 'painting'. The painters are women. They are housewives as well as shamans.

This private paintings painted on each house started to be known inside and outside of India after a severe drought caused a famine in 1967. Indian government promoted this painting as a source of income and support for women by having them paint on paper. As Mithila painting was commercialised, it was separated from rituals and festivals and the women started paint their favourite subject matter freely. The theme and actual expression went beyond the traditional framework. The representative Mithila artists are Ganga Devi (deceased), Godawari Dutta and Bauwa Devi.

There is a range of paintings from monochrome paintings to colourful ones depending on the castes of painters.

IV Walri Painting

Walri Painting has been succeeded among Walri tribes in Thane (north of Bombay), Maharashtra. Just as Mithila Painting, it is painted on the walls of each house at festivals and rituals wishing for peaceful life and abundance and it is also a method of communicating with the gods. The geometric patterns and indigenous gods are painted only in white rice juice. They are very simple and said to have a common source with prehistorical cave paintings.

The reason why this Walri painting became one of the representative folk arts of India is that the Indian government started to promote it to secure the income of the tribe after the success of Mithila Painting. The project was aimed to save the tribes from the poverty by commercializing their painting and as a result, it became a well known folk art in and out of the country.

While some artists are said to be skilful and masters, there are some traditions lost. Walri Painting was used to be painted by man and woman dividing their themes, but this traditional division of the roles are now lost. In addition to the traditional motifs, however, they started painting the motifs of folk tales, life in the village and genre paintings which was never painted before. It can be said that the possibility of new expressions of Walri Painting is becoming larger.

In this space, the works of Jivya Soma Mashe and his sons, who are the representative Walri Painting, are exhibited.