

FOLK ARTISTS OF MITHILA
SOME NOTES

PREPARED BY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL STUDIES

SPONSORED BY
THE INDIAN COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

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1979

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Folk Artists of Mithila

Some Notes

Nalini Singh, Raymond Owens, Erika Moser

Prepared by
Institute of Social Studies

Sponsored by
The Indian Council of Social Science Research

FOREWORD

These monographs are extracted from a book - Five Indian Projects involving women - some Notes, prepared by the Institute of Social Studies, with the help of some other researchers and the financial support of the ICSSR.

The book is an attempt to identify criteria through which attempts at enhancing women's lives can be assessed. Hence each chapter highlights a component, a paradox or both.

While in the initial years after 1975 there was a tendency to jump to hasty applause or hasty disapproval depending on whether women's gainful activity or home bound chores were strengthened, - in 1979 there is hesitation in passing quick judgement, reflecting deeper understanding of the complexities of women's situation.

The women's question is not a paper sail boat in a calm slow stream. It is a current in the stream and will take deep analysis and reflection not only by "policy makers" - but by women and men, to know how to treat the current well.

The book therefore describes 5 "projects", initially identified as "successful" - for the exercise. Surveys were conducted on the sites of the participant women apart from the "leaders". The description dominates the chapters rather than the analysis. This is because of a

hope that these projects could provide a resource, a source of inspiration to those concerned with women's condition. It is also because some insights on how to look at women's condition emerged, as ex-poste wisdom - when all the material was put together and considered.

These monographs are published separately - so that they might also reach those interested in specific programme development - to provide the "model" as well as to caution against oversimplification.

There are five in this group:

- I Street Vendors of Ahmedabad
- II Milk Producers of Kaira District
- III Pappad Rollers of Lijjat
- IV Folk Artists of Mithila
- V Night Patrollers of Manipur

DEVAKI JAIN
New Delhi, January 1979

Folk Painters of Mithila, Bihar

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Bibliography

Abbreviations

- HHEC : Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation of India, Ministry of Commerce, Government of India
- AIHB : All India Handicrafts Board, Ministry of Commerce, Government of India
- CCIE : Central Cottage Industries Emporium, Ministry of Commerce, Government of India
- BSEPHDC: Bihar State Handloom, Powerloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation, Government of Bihar
- BSSIC : Bihar State Small Industries Corporation, Government of Bihar
- BSEC : Bihar State Export Corporation, Government of Bihar
- MSEC : Marketing & Service Extension Centre of AIHB, located at Madhubani, Bihar

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Acknowledgements

This series of monographs has grown from a small event - when Kamala Choudhry mentioned the work of Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmedabad to J.P. Naik who on the spot commissioned a visit and report, to be supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research's (ICSSR) Women Studies Programme. Arvind Bhai Buch who was present extended an invitation and the journey was on. To these three initiators our first salute.

In this long journey of over two years, these studies have absorbed the help and goodwill of many persons and institutions.

First, the enthusiasm and interest shown by the men and women whose work is the subject of this book. To them these monographs are dedicated.

We acknowledge with gratitude the support - physical, financial and intellectual of Shri Bharat Sahay and H.P. Misra of the All India Handicrafts Board, of Erika Moser of the Heidelberg University, of Ray Owens of the University of Texas at Austin, USA, of Gauri Misra, Subodh Jha, Bhaskar Kulkarni, of artists Jamuna Devi, Ramji, Sita Devi, Mahasundari Devi, Baua Devi, and several others friends in Jitwarpur and Ranti.

The Institute has participated in many other studies as well as meetings since the beginning of this series. Each

one of these have added invaluable dimensions to this book. The list of these reports, books, articles, meetings and committees is attached at the end of this volume. To the "hosts" our gratitude for the education.

Being a small organisation the Institute relies heavily on the physical and other resources of certain other fraternal organisations. These are the Industrial Development Services and the Indian Cooperative Union. We have constantly called upon these organisations for all manner of help and have no measure on how to thank them except to say that this effort is as much theirs as ours. They have provided the crucial buffer stock in all manner of ways for the book. We particularly thank here L.C. Jain and R. Kalyanasundaram. We are also grateful to the Cooperative League of the United States of America - M.R. Wingard and Primrose Vigie for having accommodated us.

The typing for these monographs has been unending as it has been composed in spurts - always interrupted by other commitments, and thus has been a nuisance for those who have provided us with this kind of assistance. Our gratitude for this kind of support with an unbelievable level of tolerance first to Nirmala Chari who took on the bulk of it, to G.D. Kashyap whose craftsmanship and inbuilt editing saved

us hours of proof reading, to Malati Vasudevan nee Chari whom we are missing but who started all of it, to Badri Nath our ever ready friend who always pulled us out of despondency.

Our last but largest measure of gratitude to the Indian Council of Social Science Research - which for this effort has been embodied in the exciting, flexible personnel who work in it. We thank them for their patience in waiting for this series* which was one of the first assignments they sponsored, and which has been so delayed in delivery. For that understanding, indulgence and encouragement, we bow to Vina Majumdar - a woman for all reasons.

Nalini Singh, Devaki Jain, Malini Chand
January, 1979

*Also prepared as a book : 5 Indian Efforts involving
Women -- Some Notes.

Folk Artists of Mithila

Introduction

More than 400 women in four villages in Madhubani district of Bihar have turned the traditional skill of wall and floor painting into a source of income generation. In the last 10 years period, several of them have earned over Rs 10,000 each through the sale of paintings executed on hand-made paper.

The skill of painting is latent in the Mithila area, and is traditionally repositied in the women. The paintings were promoted commercially by agencies such as the All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB) and the Handloom and Handicrafts Export Corporation (HHEC) in 1966-67 as part of a famine relief programme. In that year officers-cum-art explorers scoured the famine-stricken villages for a marketable skill which could be used to funnel funds into the area, rather than giving a onceover grant. They saw the artistic merit and the commercial potential of the vibrant frescoes on the mud walls of Mithila villages. Through a series of inspired stimuli, the traditional skill was transformed into an instrument of income generation, and a semi-permanent supplement to the household income from agriculture, priestly service or salaried employment.

Marketing has proved to be the life-line of the Mithila painting explosion. Ingenuity and discrimination characterised

the efforts of the HNEC and AIHB to project Mithila paintings as a fine art product. The rustic lines of Mithila paintings were introduced to the art world through display in exclusive exhibitions of art and culture, as a cherished component of Indian heritage. The sophisticated restraint of the marketing technique stimulated the interest of foreign buyers in the new Indian art product. As demand increased from western buyers and at home, more and more households were swept into the painting boom.

Women became important economic contributors overnight, and the family made time/work allocational adjustments to reserve adequate time for the artist. Gradually males started assisting them by filling in colours in the black line contours drawn by the women. At the peak of the Madhubani wave in 1973-74, virtually all households in ^{villages} Jitwarpur and a majority in Ranti ^{Madhubani District} were earning a regular, though small, income from painting.

As the novelty of the folk paintings wore off, demand shrank, partly as a result of over-exposure, and partly on account of heedless commercialisation by official and private promoters. The product lost ground in the art/handicrafts market in the post-74 period. At present there are about 200 households in Jitwarpur and Ranti which earn a steady income from painting.

The successful commercial development of the traditional skill of painting through home based production in Mithila is a

novel achievement. Underscoring its distinction are the facts of its purely decorative form (sans 'utility'), and the dominance of women as crafts persons. Several classical features of development of crafts are also subsumed in the Mithila 'project'. The predominance of subsistence agriculture as a source of income in the area, the low stock of 'modern skills' in the work force, cultural conservatism towards women's work, these are common characteristics of several rural areas of the country.

Do handicrafts offer a viable source of employment? viable both in terms of investment outlay and stable employment with adequate compensation for the work input? Would income from crafts enhance women's status at home and in the community? Generalising from the case of Mithila paintings, this report attempts some tentative answers.

Section II : The Background

Mithila, the home of about thirty million people of north Bihar, is the Terai region south of the Himalayas and north of the rivers, Ganga and Gandak. For centuries this sweep of fertile land has been isolated from the rest of the country, and has internalised a pronounced socio-cultural tradition. It is a land with an abundance of water which keeps the vegetation lush all year round, although a failure of the monsoons might destroy crops. Predominantly rural, the area encompasses nine northern districts of Bihar¹, describing an arc at the foot-hills of the towering mountain range.

Indices of development present a negative picture of Mithila. The area is industrially backward; the per capita income of Bihar is lower than the national average; work participation is lower than the national average, particularly for females²; infra-structural development has been retarded as seen in the availability of medical facilities, schools, length of roads etc.

Yet visually Mithila is spectacularly beautiful. Villages of mud-walled houses are ringed by thick trees, dense vines canopy

1 The districts are Champaran, Sitamarhi, Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, Samastipur, Madhubani, Darbhanga, Saharsa and Purnea.

2 Census '71 work participation rates :

	Persons	Male	Female
All India	33.54	52.53	13.18
Bihar	31.96	52.40	10.58

huts, delicately-hued flowers grow wild, ponds are imbued with the deep blue of the Himalayan skies and support a profusion of aquatic life and there are several species of birds.

Mithila ^{was} is the seat of Raja Janak, the father of Sita, the Mithila princess who wed Lord Rama. Their epic saga, the Ramayana, which is a holy book for Hindus, includes a poignant 14-year sojourn in the forests by the youthful princes of Ayodhya and the princess. The Ramcharitmanas written in the vernacular by the poet-saint Tulsidas in 1633, is a currently popular version of the epic. The rich Mithila setting is described on several occasions. At one point, as the poet follows Lord Rama, his brother Lakshman and their guru Vishwamitra on their way to Janakpur for Sita's swayamvar (wedding by own choice), they note that the houses in the town are painted vividly with figures and motifs¹. This is perhaps the earliest recorded reference to the tradition of painting in Mithila.

In more recent times the area has been dominated by the rulers of Darbhanga, an erstwhile princely estate of north Bihar. Maharajah Darbhanga and zamindars (landlords with local fiefdoms) patronised the arts, and exerted a marked influence on the development of the visual arts and music. In the common tradition of the day, the patrons commissioned artists to craft a particular product/item, or retained craftsmen at an honorarium to perform at court on demand, or invited them to the court. The Maharajah's palaces

1 See Ramcharitmanas, 'Bal-Kand', Chaupai following Doha 212, by Goswami Tulsidas (Publishers : Geeta Press, Gorakhpur).

The verse reads (original in Avadhi Bhasha)

Mangalmaye mandir sab keren; Chitrit janu Ratinath chitre,
Pur nar-nari subhag suchi santa; Dharamsil gyani gunvanta

Translation:

Everyone's house has been made auspicious; on them are paintings seemingly painted by Kamadev the Artist himself. Men and women of the town are beautiful, pure, saintly, noble, learned and talented.

in Darbhanga and country houses in the Mithila area are adorned with specimens of local art. Frescoes and panels of wall paintings of the Mithila folk style are visible in almost all buildings of the estate.

Land was largely held by big absentee landlords who leased it out to tenant-farmers. The land was cultivated by agricultural labourers. The relationship between lessor and lessee was based on the acceptance of the hereditary rights of exploitation conferred by ownership. The lessor's share of the crop was frequently in excess of half. Agriculture labourers worked in conditions of serfdom, and were usually attached or bonded to the cultivator.

The prevalence of the 'layered' organisation of agriculture with the in-built check on motivation to maximise production might have been an important cause of the slow economic growth of the region. Its geographical isolation ^{cut off} ~~cut off~~ of the area from the development efforts mounted in other parts of the country, and might also have bred in the people certain resistance to change induced by outside agents. This historical process might underlie the modest economic profile of current-day Mithila.

Rigid traditions determined the code of conduct of the 'Royalty', the nobility, the professionals and the laity -- the 'ryot'. Many of these traditions have survived into the present

day, and operate in today's Mithila. Functions of individuals in respect of intra-household behaviour, occupation, marriage, social contact, inheritance, education etc. are clearly delineated by convention. Social status is a compound of caste, wealth, ethnic purity, and the extent of the seclusion of women. The last variable, the deliberate limitation of contact of women with the outside world, is emulated first by a household moving up the status ladder. Sanskritisation ^{appears} seems to have ^{constrained} a ^{part} women of Brahmin and Kayastha households from taking outside-household ~~work~~ ^{work,} ~~as an women's wage employment in households of the scheduled and Kayastha castes,~~ while for women of the scheduled castes, agricultural wage work is a component of the traditional role assigned to them. In the higher castes women fulfil their traditional role not by contributing to the family income but by displaying keen adherence to ritual in prayers, ritualistic cooking supervision of the household, frequent motherhood, of child-care and demonstrative care of the sick and elderly.

Family and kinship override caste in the Mithila area. The family is the operational unit for cultivation of land (although ownership may be on an individual basis); the determination and performance of life cycle rites such as marriage, fertility rites, death ceremonies; decisions relating to education; migration in search of employment etc. The head of the household is almost always a male patriarch and in respect of many issues his authority is final.

Households are clustered together generally on the basis of clans or sub-castes, and a large group comprises a hamlet ('tola'). Typically a village might have one 'tola' of scheduled caste households, a Brahmin 'tola', Kayastha 'tola' and one or more sub-caste hamlets.

Each caste (and sub-caste in some cases) lives by an intricate calendar of rituals whose observance is compulsory, although the scale might vary according to the resources of the household. For special occasions such as weddings, first arrival of a wife in the husband's home, births, initiation rites of boys etc. there are long and complicated series of rituals. Most of the rituals are attended by special songs and symbolic drawings, designs, ^{and} paintings etc. There are differences of detail between the observance of rituals by different castes, so that each caste or sub-caste has its own sequencing of ceremonies, repertoire of appropriate songs and illustrative drawings. In the Brahmin and Kayastha castes there is evidence of a more intensive use of paintings and drawings in the celebration of an event.

Illustrations which accompany rituals are roughly classifiable as those which are used in the Vedic observance of the ritual, and others which govern the ritual but are not central to its religious observance. Yet in the perception of the rural Maithil there is almost no distinction or ranking of significance of the two sets of illustrations, and each component of a ritual is considered equally crucial in its correct observance.

~~The~~ interest in this distinction stems from the fact that whereas the core Vedic rites are performed by male priests and attended by men, the 'frill' or marginal rites are generally performed by women. The two series of ceremonies are held parallelly in different sections of the house so that one group is often ignorant about the ceremonial details of the ritual performed by the other group. For example, in a Brahmin wedding ceremonies such as the traditional pounding of unhusked paddy by eight men while reciting a Sanskrit mantra to Lord Vishnu, are performed only in the presence of male relatives, while female relatives in another part of the house participate indirectly in the ceremony by singing about it in the colloquial Maithili dialect. Or again during the Dussehra celebrations men of the village sit on the inner sanctum of the temple and chant Sanskrit verses in praise of the goddess Kali, while women sit behind a screen outside and interpret the ceremony for themselves through Maithili songs. Since the knowledge of Sanskrit is almost non-existent among women, their perception of the ceremony deviates significantly from its actual content as performed in the presence of men.

Some rituals are performed exclusively by women. For example, the traditional bathing of the bride-to-be at the village pond and the worship of Gauri, the divine wife of the ideal celestial couple Gauri-Shankar, is attended only by women.

The exclusion of women from religious ceremonies of the Great Tradition, and the emergence of women-dominated Little Tradition

1. See also Naomi Owens "wedding songs of the Brahmin Painters of Mithila, 1977 (unpublished research report)

ceremonies has been an important factor in developing women's skills at painting. Unlike Vedic rituals, which are strictly defined, and in which the priest makes the preparations, the women's rituals are relatively free-format. Women themselves collect the items required for the ceremony, prepare the place ritualistically by swobbing, decorating, festooning, etc., and perform the ritual. As the audience and participants are all female, the rituals reflect the natural female predilections for ornamentation and colour. Vivid paintings are basic to the decoration of the place of ritual, and intricate traditions have evolved over time in respect of the symbolic content of the painting and drawings. The most common themes of women's paintings in ritual decorations are fertility and invocation of blessings for conjugal happiness as portrayed in the exploits of Krishna with Radha and the Gopis, the divine pair Shiva and Gauri, Ganapati, the epic of Rama and Sita, the ten Avatars, the sun and the moon.

A theme which is a favourite with Mithila women, and constantly occurs in their commercial paintings, is the Kohbar chart with which the walls of the nuptial chamber are decorated. Steeped in symbolism and innuendo, symbols of alankar and fertility crowd the walls of the secluded inner room where the groom will first meet his bride. A frame of lotuses encloses a bamboo forest in which the newly wedded couple are placed. Depicting their pictorial union are symbols such as the bee and the flower, which might recur in the corners of the chart embroidering the frame.

The Purain (lotus pond) is juxtaposed with the bamboo forest, drawing a female-male symbol from flora. Fish motifs remind the couple of the channels of the visual transmission of energy, the tortoise flops indecorously in the painting as a powerful symbol of the psychic transmission of energy. The sun, the moon, the ten Avatars witness the union, and other deities are represented by their symbols such as the snake, plough. Even as these auspicious symbols of union are drawn, the tenuousness of life is represented by the lotus frame which suggests that the painting is submerged in water, for in the end "all is water". The vivid Kohbar chart transforms the mud walls into grand tapestries.

There are two traditions in ritual paintings in Mithila -- wall paintings and floor designs. Both co-exist, and often reinforce each other's thematic content. Wall paintings are representative and narrative, and might include a few highly stylised symbolic features. The main function of wall paintings is to paint god-witnesses to the ceremony so that their blessings are secured for the auspicious ceremony. These paintings are made both on the outsides and in the insides of houses.

Floor designs or aripans are energy-filled geometrical diagrams or patterns which serve as altars on the floor for the performance of a ritual. They include astrological charts based on the lunar cycle. Aripans are ritualistically determined, and represent the convergence of Hindu ritual and art. These diagrams are drawn on the floors of houses (both inside and in courtyards),

at ponds, under sacred trees, or other pre-determined auspicious locations.

Floor paintings are made several times a year in accordance with the festival cycle, but wall paintings are executed occasionally at special ceremonies. In more than 90% of these rituals, the artist is a woman for both wall paintings and floor designs.

Another category of diagrammatical motifs is made in the Mithila area, not by women, but by Brahmin priests. These are diagrams based in tantra, and representative of Shakti. There is a wide variation of tantric subjects, each with an aura of potent properties. Yantra or mystical diagrams supposedly possess occult powers, and are considered to be instruments of metaphysical influence.

Wall paintings and aripans have been commercially developed and are internationally famous as 'Madhubani paintings'. Yantras and tantric diagrams are the least commercialised of Mithila paintings, although there is striking visual similarity between floor designs and Yantras. Commercialisation has freed wall paintings and aripans from thematic rigidity, and there are no sacrosanct rules which govern the content of paintings made for urban consumers. There is a strong tendency to make the paintings more illustrative and picturesque. For example, it is now unusual to find blank spaces in commercially Mithila paintings in response

to market feed-back about the buyer's disappointment at a sparsely illustrated folk painting, although in the pure artistic tradition of the region blanks are 'pools of tranquility'.

Before the painting boom, women used vegetable dyes or colours prepared from local materials. Black was obtained from burnt jowar or kajal, yellow from turmeric or from chuna (lime) mixed with the milk of the barh tree, orange from the palas flower, red from the kusum flower or red earth, green from the chlorophyll-rich foliage, white from rice flour. The colours were first pound into powder and then dissolved in milk to make a paste. For floor drawings the rice flour was mixed with water for the motif, and dots of vermilion were added later.

Bazar colours are now frequently used, especially for commercial painting. Women purchase the cheapest chemical colours (of the group of basic dyes) and dissolve them in gum paste. Modern colours are available in a much wider range of hues than self-prepared colours, and are more vivid. Commercial Mithila paintings fully reflect the brightness of the modern powders, but run the risk of fading within a period of 2-3 years, since the cheap colours are vulnerable to atmospheric corrosion.

A degree of specialisation among women artists of different caste groups is evident, especially in respect of commercialised paintings. In the paintings of Brahmin women there is a prominence of vibrant colour -- scarlets, yellow, tangerine. "The theme is

narrative, and colours convey the energy and passion of the artist's imagination. Colours create the mood, establish the pulse and tempo, divide the space and provide the background¹. On the other hand, Kayastha women artists are masters of the line contour -- confident and bold lines convey the artistic inspiration. Tight strokes create an aripan design or a narrative illustration with precision and fineness of detail. The outlines are etched in black and occasionally filled in with muted ochres and earth colours. Harijan women have specialised in abstract illustrative motifs which draw their content from the routine of daily life, and not from any religious or mythological tradition.

Commercial Mithila paintings belong to the category of the so-called 'domestic arts' or those aesthetic products which are crafted by individuals from local raw materials for use in their cultural-religious traditions. They are made without reward of money or prestige, and are not considered art at all by the community. Other items of domestic art produced in the Mithila area are objects made from Sikki grass, clay, cotton, rags, papier mache, lac, embroidery etc. Some of these items have been picked up by developmental agencies for commercialisation, but success has been limited in comparison to the phenomenal popularity enjoyed by folk paintings. The ease of marketing a 2-dimensional product and the exquisite novelty of the folk paintings induced the promoters to concentrate their efforts on this product.

1 'Paintings of Mithila', Pupul Jayakar, Times of India Annual, 1971 (extract from the author's publication 'The Eastern Drum: an introduction to the rural arts of India')

2

Section III : The people and the Artists

The commercial hub of Mithila paintings is centred in Jitwarpur and Ranti, two villages flanking Madhubani town within a distance of 5 kms, although commercial painting is practised in at least 16 other villages in Madhubani district. Qualitative impressions show that Jitwarpur and Ranti account for about 60 per cent of the total sales of paintings, and two other villages, Rasidpur and Pandaul have a 25% share of total sales. These four villages represent 85% of the sales turnover of folk paintings in the Madhubani area.

With a population of over 2,000 each (Jitwarpur : population Census '71 1303; Ranti: population 3552, 1971 Census), both villages are relatively large. Schools, dispensaries, post offices, tubewells are located in the villages. Metalled roads have established easy access. The impact of the town is discernible in the consumption pattern of the villages and in their highly developed political consciousness, ^{according to} qualitative impression gained during field surveys conducted in the course of the present investigation. Literacy levels are higher than the state average for rural areas, and each village has some college-educated youth.

The major sources for the following statistical profile of the people and artists are, one, census of households in Jitwarpur, 1977, conducted by Dr Raymond Owens (Social Anthropologist, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin, Texas) and ^{his} associates; two, private research notes of selected households in Jitwarpur, 1977, of Subodh Jha, Ph.D scholar at Mithila University, Muzaffarpur, Bihar; and three, field survey of selected women artists in villages Jitwarpur and Ranti conducted by the Institute of Social Studies in 1977. Research findings of other scholars have also been used. Prominent among these is Dr Erika Moser (Social Anthropologist, Heidelberg University, W. Germany).

A. The people

(i) Caste: There are four major castes in the village, viz. Brahmin, Kayastha and Harijan. The rough distribution of the population between these three castes is Brahmin 43.5%, Kayastha 15%; Sudra 13.5% and Scheduled Caste 28%.

The Brahmin community is further divided into two sub-castes, each with distinctive features, viz. the Maithils and the Mahapatras. The latter occupy the lowest status in the hierarchy of five Brahmin sub-castes in the area. The Mahapatra priests traditionally perform ceremonies associated with death and each priest household has ancestral client 'rights' to certain households of the village and the neighbourhood. The erstwhile Maharajah of Darbhanga also retained Mahapatra priests in Jitwarpur.

The 'Jajman' or client households pay an annual retainer to the Mahapatra priests and make special gifts to them at the time of death in the family.

The Maithils are associated with learning and temple priesthood. They enjoy ancestral monopoly over certain temples, and perform special prayers associated ^{with} ~~special occasions such as~~ marriage, thread ceremony etc. Tradition has also assigned the Maithil Brahmins the role of teaching ~~in the spirit of~~ Hindu scriptures i.e. voluntary transfer of knowledge. In modern-day Jitwarpur, ~~this role is enhanced in~~ the preponderance of Mathil Brahmins amongst school teachers in Sanskrit-medium schools in the neighbourhood, is evidence of the continuation of this tradition.

The Kayastha caste supplied administrators to the feudal fiefdoms of the past. Large estates were managed entirely by salaried Kayastha families for the 'ruling' class. The hereditary administrative skill of Kayasthas is manifested today in their virtual monopoly over the posts of local administrators at the block and village levels. The State 'Karamcharis' or petty administrators in this region are predominantly Kayasthas. Salaried service as clerk, supervisor, peon etc. generally takes the men away from the village to Madhubani, Patna and even Calcutta. There is a fairly high incidence of non-resident workers in Kayastha households, many of whom depend on income repatriated from absent family members.

The women who learn to cope without their men-folk, show a certain self-sufficiency and boldness not seen among other caste groups.

Harijans or persons of the Scheduled Caste comprise the bottom rung of the social hierarchy in Jitwarpur, as in almost all Indian villages. Scavenging, animal hide-processing and agricultural labour are the traditional occupations assigned to Harijans. In Jitwarpur, the majority of the Harijans are still engaged in these occupations, and only a few have ventured into allied occupations such as rickshaw coolies, head loaders.

(ii) Occupation: A survey of 135 households in Jitwarpur (1977)¹ shows that agriculture and salaried service are the two most common primary occupations in the village, each accounting for about 25% of the households surveyed. Within agriculture, cultivation is the major source of income for a majority, while agricultural labour supports a fewer number of households. Painting is reported as the primary occupation by 20% of the households². Most of the households combine cultivation with painting, or salaried service with painting, or in a few cases, agricultural

1 Ref. Subodh Jha, private research notes (ibid)

2 This estimate is regarded as an over-estimate by some researchers including Dr Erika Moser. According to her survey, the percentage of households in which painting is the primary source of income is 2%-3%.

labour with painting. The following summary tabulation shows that over 85% of the surveyed households have more than one occupation.

Table : Primary and secondary occupational pattern of households in Jitwarpur

Occupation	No. of households which reported engaging in the occupation	%age of households in col. 2 for whom the occupation is the only source of income (per cent)	%age of households in col. 2 for whom the occupation contributes more than 50% of family income (per cent)	%age of households in col. 2 for whom the occupation contributes less than 50% of family income (per cent)	Tot
1	2	3	4	5	6
Cultivation	94	5.3	21.3	73.4	10
Salaried service	49	14.3	65.3	20.4	10
Painting	66	3.0	34.8	62.2	10
Jajmani and priest service	62	4.0	23.5	72.5	10
Agricultural labour	11	9.1	63.6	27.3	10

Total number of households surveyed : 135

Source: Private research notes, survey of selected households in Jitwarpur, Subodh Jha (Maithil University, Bihar)

Agriculture and painting are the most common occupations of households in the village, but the occupations which account for the major source of income in most cases are salaried service and agriculture. This would indicate that although painting is a popular profession, it is not as remunerative as cultivation or service.

Brahmins in Jitwarpur have made the most notable compromises with caste-determined occupations. ^{The} Survey shows that in only 35% of the Brahmin households Jajmani or priestly service is the major source of income. In the other households Brahmins depend variously on agriculture, salaried service or painting as the major ~~occupation~~ ^{source of income}. In agriculture Brahmins make a careful distinction between cultivation and agricultural labour. The former is now not considered inconsistent with their high caste-related status, but wage labour in agriculture is still avoided. Salaried service is generally taken up grudgingly since the Brahmin does not consider it honourable to work for a wage. Painting on the other hand has the sanction of the community since it is a form of self-employment with a throwback to the traditional vocation of priesthood and learning. Compared to the other two caste groups, Kayastha and Harijans, the Brahmins have a much higher proportion of practising painters.

(iii) Women's occupation: Whereas the traditional occupational pattern of males in Jitwarpar has responded to economic imperatives, women's participation in economic activities has continued to be rigidly circumscribed by tradition. Women of Brahmin households (Maithil as well as Mahapatra) do not engage either in agriculture or in non-agricultural wage employment. Self-employment in traditional crafts such as painting, Sikki work, mat weaving, etc. is 'allowed', but not necessarily practised either because of a lack of resources or sluggish demand.

By contrast, both the Kayastha and Harijan women participate in agricultural activities ranging from supervision of hired help on family farms among Kayasthas, to casual or bonded labour amongst Harijans. On the average, female agricultural labourers might find work for 150 days during the year, and unpaid female helpers on the family farm might work for a similar period. The crafts practised by Kayastha women are similar to those in which Brahmins engage. But Harijan women generally do not possess such skills, and their crafts are rougher and more utility-oriented. For instance, they make rough pottery, twig baskets and earn a pittance by selling them in the agricultural lean season.

Women who are the sole supporters of their households -- widows, abandoned wives etc. -- do not operate within the norms

of their hierarchical caste. They seem to engage in all available work, since the need to fight economic destitution appears to supersede all other considerations.

(iv) Household Income: The average annual household income of the surveyed household in Jitwarpur is approximately Rs. 3,000. However, over 60 per cent of the households fall below this average, and about 25% report an annual income below Rs 1,000. Rough estimates show that 20% of the higher income households account for half of the total income earned in the village. Six households have an annual income above Rs 10,000. The higher income households exhibit three characteristics, viz. either one of the family members has a well-paid salaried job in a city, or the family has a well-known artist, or there are 3 or more regular workers in the household. The poorer households include households where a woman is the sole supporter, or where there is a high dependency ratio (i.e. a nuclear family with several small children and only one worker), or agricultural labour households. Applying a norm of Rs 20 per capita per month as defining the poverty line, approximately 30 per cent of the households in Jitwarpur subsist below it. The proportion below the poverty line would increase dramatically if the norm of Rs 60 per capita/month as used by the Draft Plan, 1979-84, is applied.

Income from the sale of paintings accounts for approximately 35-40% of total household income in the surveyed households,

Figures on household income are based on the private research notes of Subodh Sha (ibid), cross-checked with the findings of the field survey conducted by the Institute of Social Studies. 22

although it varies in the range 10-100% of household income.

(v) Ownership of land: In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Brahmins of Jitwarpur received substantial gifts of land from the Maharajah of Darbhanga who owned a vast tract of Mithila territory. The priests obtained the titles to the land, but appointed Kayastha managers to cultivate and administer the lands. In times of drought or famine in the decades of the '30's and '40's of the present century the lands were sold by the Brahmins in distress sales to buyers from outside the village. However, subsequent gifts by wealthy Jajmans restored some of the lands to residents of Jitwarpur.

In the drought of 1966-67, ~~several~~ ^{several} ~~of~~ the land-owning households of the village sold their land to non-residents and the cultivable land around Jitwarpur passed almost entirely into the hands of absentee landlords.

With the advent of government developmental agencies and the escalation in demand for paintings, ~~several~~ ^{many} residents of the village started buying back land. Since there was skewed distribution of earnings from paintings, there was a corresponding inequality in the purchase of land by the artist households. Well-known artists spent Rs 10-15,000 on the land purchase, while those whose earnings from paintings were lower could purchase

only tiny plots. The acquisition of land is ~~in~~ the priority objective of almost all Kayastha households which earn an income from painting. Brahmins assign priority to the repayment of debt¹, while Harijan artists tend to spend the money on food and liquor as the purchase of land appears an unattainable goal.

Currently, almost 50 per cent of households in Jitwarpur own small patches of land, less than 1 bigha. These patches are partially covered by well-irrigation, to the extent of 60-70% of the land. The annual net income from 1 bigha of land is reported to be approximately Rs 500. Many households do not sell the foodgrains -- paddy, wheat and ragi -- but use it for self-consumption. 10 per cent of the households own 1-2 bighas, while 20% of the households have slightly larger farms, 2-5 bighas. In each case, these small and marginal farmers augment their income from cultivation by agricultural labour and other gainful activities including painting².

The 'big' landlords of the village, accounting for 5 per cent of the household population, own relatively small farms, 5-10 bighas. In this respect Jitwarpur diverges from the feudal pattern of land-holding in north Bihar which is typically a concentration of land in 5 to 10 households³.

15% of the households are landless. Most of these families belong to the Scheduled Castes. However, homestead land

1 Findings of the survey conducted by Dr Erika Moser are at variance with the findings of the ISS survey in respect of the priority use of money. She has pointed out that Kayasthas are more likely to assign importance to the purchase of 'modern' goods such as synthetic clothing, bicycle, transistor radios etc. while the Brahmins would invest in land.

2 Data on land ownership is derived from private research notes of Subodh Jha (ibid)

3 Based on ISS field survey

is self-owned by them. These households subsist on the agricultural wage of Rs 3.25 per day or its equivalent in foodgrains¹. Income from off-season occupations such as clay pottery, basket weaving fluctuates widely.

(vi) Family Organisation: A local variant of the extended family system is the most common form of family structure in Jitwarpur. Grown-up sons and their families stay on with the parents in the original homestead but in separate dwellings. Often when a married son's wife first goes to stay in her married home, a small room with a hearth is constructed to accommodate the new couple, and each nuclear unit might have its own cooking arrangement. However, the central courtyard or 'angana' is shared by all the nuclear families, and represents the hub of family life. This extended-yet-nuclear organisation of families incorporates several advantages of joint living (e.g. collective care of children and the aged, physical security, work sharing as in water/fuel collection etc.), and yet retains separate economic identity so that financial responsibilities are clearly delineated. The latter serves to compel men to work in a feudal society where prestige is traditionally related to the absence of financial pressure on the male to earn an income².

1 Based on the ISS field survey

2 In the land holding pattern prevalent in the Mithila region in the 19th and 20th centuries, described earlier, direct cultivation was associated with wage labourers from the Scheduled Caste. Status was related to the remoteness from cultivation. Thus, for example, supervision of self-owned lands was less prestigious than absentee landlordism. In other words, status was associated with a demonstrative use of time in interests or activities which did not generate income. Feudal landlords at the apex of the social hierarchy had internalised such a value system, and other classes (particularly those linked to the landlords in tenant relationships) aspired to it (ISS field survey)

(vii) Servants: Jitwarpur and Ranti both have a tradition of live-in house servants who are usually young boys of the Scheduled Castes, or destitute women. According to survey findings servants are employed by about 7% of the households, generally to tend livestock. Quite often they are only provided food and clothing, and no remuneration. In cases where they are paid a salary, the amount ranges from Rs. 10 to Rs. 25 per month.

Maid servants are employed by ^{traditionally upper caste households in the village.} a few women artists ^{In recent years} to have employed maid servants to assist on a part-time basis to assist them with housework so that they are left with time for painting.

(viii) Livestock: About a third of the surveyed households own livestock -- cows, buffaloes, bullocks or goats. Milch animals are generally kept for self consumption, although a few households earn Rs. 3-4^{per} day by selling milk. The big land-holding households keep bullocks for ploughing, the small and marginal farmers have a buffalo or cow, and the landless agricultural labour households keep goats.

B. Who are the artists?

Following the probe into the cultural-economic setting of rural households in Mithila, the field survey focussed on women

1 Private research notes of Subodh Jha (ibid)

artists in respect of their involvement in painting. A total of 170 female artists and 11 male artists of Jitwarpur, Ranti, Basidpur, Khajauli, Salempur, Pandaul, Laberganj, Haripatti and Satagarh were interviewed.¹ About 70% of the respondents belonged to Jitwarpur and Ranti. The schedule canvassed information on the respondent's age, education, earnings from paintings, contacts with marketing agencies, awards and other distinction gained as artist. Findings of the survey are presented below.

(i) Age: About half the women artists are young married women in the age group 20-39 years. Older women in the age group 40-59 years constitute about a third of the respondents. There is a sprinkling of very young girls in the age group 10-19 years, and elderly women of 60 among the artists surveyed.

The male artist covered by the survey usually work with a female artist, wife or mother. They are predominantly young, below the age of 30 years.

(ii) Marital status: About 89% of the female respondents are married (including separated women), 7 per cent are unmarried, and 3.5 per cent are widows. Among the male artists, two-thirds are married, while the rest are ~~young~~ unmarried youth.

2 ~~This survey was conducted in 1977 by a team of sociologists and social anthropologists headed by Dr. Raymond Owens of the University of Chicago, USA.~~

1 Censuses of Households, 1977, conducted by Dr Raymond Owens and associates (Ibid)

(iii) Education: Half the female artists are illiterate, while a third are 'just literate' in terms of being able to sign their name and to read haltingly. 10-12% of the women have middle school education, and about 7% have studied upto matric. Among the male artists, the illiteracy level is lower at about 40% and all the rest have middle school or high school education.

(iv) Experience of commercial painting: Most of the artists have more than 3-4 years experience of painting for sale. The earliest entry by a respondent into the commercial stream reported during the survey was 1961. In 1963 there appears to have been a spurt in the number of commercial painters, perhaps in response to the efforts of a few officials of the Bihar government. Among the artists interviewed during the survey, 36% reported having become commercial painters before the 1966-67 recruitment drive (see Chapter 4). Following the 'discovery' of the Mithila artists by developing agencies in 1966-67, there was a sharp increase in the number of commercial painters in the surveyed villages. The two years 1967 and 1972 saw the maximum influx of artists into commercial painting. Since 1973, there has been a downward trend in the number of new entrants to the painting 'profession'.

Several of the artists who began their commercial careers in the sixties are still painting, either on paper or are being given commissions for on-site panel and mural painting. The

According to qualitative impressions gained during the ISS field survey, respondents do not have a steady, unvarying conception of the length of time which has elapsed in respect of events which took place over 5 years ago. There is a tendency to provide different estimates if questioned at different points of time.

Recent entrants, who are almost all young, are hand-picked girls who have been selected on the basis of their aptitude for the specialised training courses of the All India Handicrafts Board.

(v) Monthly productivity of artists: On an average a painting is completed in about 3 days. A third of the practising women artists report that they produce 6 to 10 paintings per month, generally with help from other members of the household. In a number of cases, the husband assists his artist wife by colouring the paintings. Another third of the respondents report their monthly productivity in the range of 11-20 paintings. A sizable number of artists, about 20%, are able to produce many more paintings, in the range of 21-40 per month. Family help is readily available to these artists, and usually a team of 2 or 3 women and men work together in the home.

Line drawings of the Kayastha households are more intricate and time-intensive than narrative illustrations of Brahmin artists and the average time required for a line drawing is 4-5 days.

A few of the lesser known artists, about 15% of the total sample, produce fewer than 5 paintings per month since they are not sure of the demand for their paintings.

There is a small coterie of skilled artists who produce very few paintings in a month -- perhaps only 1 or 2. These artists are aware of the saleability of their product, but reject the opportunity to make quick money by increased production because of their conviction that artistic inspiration gets diluted through over-use.

(vi) Annual earnings from paintings: On the basis of the income earned in 1976, the year previous to the survey, it was attempted to compute an average figure for annual earnings from paintings. However, in view of the wide dispersal of the sample across income classes, an arithmetic average was considered a misleading indicator of income from paintings. The frequency distribution shows that annual earnings from paintings range from Rs. 200 (or less than Rs. 20 per month) to more than Rs. 10,000 (or more than Rs. 800 per month). Almost 60 per cent of the respondents report earnings in the range of Rs. 500-2000 per annum, while 22 per cent of the sample falls below Rs. 500. Over 5 per cent of the respondents earn Rs. 4,000 and above from paintings annually.

These figures may be considered representative of the present situation in 1978, since there have not been any notable changes in the demand situation since 1976, the year of survey.

(vii) Total earnings since the beginning of commercialisation: Cumulative earnings of women artists since their earliest participation in commercial painting also vary in a wide range, Rs. 500 to Rs. 1

lakh. The popularity of the artist, the number of years for which she has sold her paintings, the number of marketing channels to which she has established access are all determinants of total income. For over 80% of the respondents, total earnings have been less than Rs. 25,000. About 26% of the sample report that total earnings have ranged between Rs. 10-25,000; 20% report earnings in the range Rs. 5-10,000 per annum; for about 30% of the respondents, the earnings have been lower, in the range Rs. 1-5,000; while 7% of the sample has earned less than Rs. 1,000 from paintings.

The 'famous few' who comprise about 16% of the respondents of the surveyed villages, in particular, Jitwarpur, Ranti and Rasidpur, have ~~totalled~~ ^{totalled} Rs. 25,50,000 in earnings from paintings, sometimes in as little time as 5 years. About 5% of the respondents, the leading artists, have earned over Rs. 1 lakh from paintings.

(viii) Earnings from paintings as proportion of total household income: In 40% of the interviews the respondents report that their earnings from paintings constitute 30% or less of total household income. In the rest of the households women contribute more than one-third of household income. A little over 20% of the households are those in which women's income from painting accounts for half to three-quarters of total household income; and in an equal proportion of the sample, women's income consti-

tutes more than three-quarters of household income. In at least 4 per cent of the households painting is the only source of income and women are the sole supporters.

Earnings from paintings as proportion of household income

<u>Percentage contribution of income from paintings to household income</u>	<u>Percentage of respondents</u>
Negligible	4.4
Upto 20%	11.6
21%-30%	22.1
31%-50%	19.3
51%-75%	21.5
76%-99%	16.6
100%	3.9

There are fluctuations in income over time. Even the better known artists experience variations in average annual earnings. For example, whereas average earnings from paintings increased sharply in Jitwarpur and Banti in the period 1968-73, in the years 1975-77 there has been a general decline in earnings from paintings.

(ix) Income allocation between different uses: Buyers, both official agencies and private traders, generally pay cash to the family member who sells the painting. Our survey shows that both women and men of the household make the sale. The cash is

1 ISS field survey

considered family income rather than the earnings of an individual. Most often the women, whenever they receive the money, pass it on to the head of the household. The reverse is not true. Generally the income is spent by men, although they might consult the women about its distribution between different uses. In a few cases, as with widows or a dominant female personality, the women exercise full control over their earnings.

The major items purchased by the women's income are food, paper and colour, children's education, medicines, house repair/construction, and acquisition of land. This list is furnished by women respondents on the basis of their perception, but since they do not actually handle all their income, and because men tend to assign different expenditure priorities, the actual expenditure pattern might be different.

The Survey shows that
Women cherish their role as income earning artists, and are specially proud of their ability to support a higher standard of health and nutrition for the family. In the event of a disruption in their earnings from painting, they consider it unlikely that their men would have either the resources, capacity or will to maintain the higher standard of living. The women are not confident that they themselves would be able to compensate the loss in income from painting by engaging in any other income

generating activity, especially one which allows home-based production.

(x) Tools and techniques of painting: For the majority of the respondents the skill of painting is hereditary, and they have not received any formal training in painting. The initial instruction by the spearhead team of the All India Handicrafts Board in 1966-67 is the only training in painting on paper that the women can remember. A very small number of women have attended the training and orientation courses sponsored by the AIHB centre at Madhubani (see Chapter 4). The 'famous' artists seem to provide inspiration to most of the surveyed women artists, although there is no tradition of apprenticeship training in the village.

On the average, the women artists paint for 6-7 months in the year for commercial sales. Only the recognised artists have work for the entire year. The women spend 3-6 hours per day on painting. These hours are discrete, and are interspersed with domestic work, child care, animal husbandry.

All the artists work at home, their papers spread out on straw mats. The finished paintings are rolled, wrapped in old saris or polythene paper and stored in iron trunks in the huts.

A twig or a stalk of straw pulled out from the thatched roof serves as the painting tool. The outline is etched with

the splinter, or nowadays with a writing pen. Swabs of cotton or cotton wool are wrapped around the sticks for applying colour. Floor designs are drawn with the last three fingers of the right hand, while the geometrical lines are drawn with a bamboo pen or writing pen.

Hand-made paper (of standard size 22"x30") and colours are purchased from a government approved shop in Madhubani. Most often purchases ^{are} made by men for the women. Sometimes paintings are made on other surfaces/materials such as silk (from Bhagalpur in Bihar), masonite board, straw board etc. This would depend on the 'order'.

Women artists purchase the raw materials with their own resources. Since 1974, the State Bank of India in Madhubani has offered working loans of Rs 150 to Rs 400 per artist to selected women artists recommended by the AIHB Marketing and Service Extension Centre at Madhubani. ^(See page 44) Artists are introduced to bank officials by MSEC staff either at the bank offices in Madhubani, or during the officials' visits to the villages. The loans are extended on the basis of group collateral, and carry an interest of 4 per cent per annum under the Bank's Preferential Interest Scheme. The repayment schedule stipulates a complete repayment of the debt in 10 monthly instalments starting 2 months after the grant of the loan. Survey shows

ISS field survey

that loans are used partially for purchasing raw materials for paintings, but a proportion also goes towards consumption needs. On the average 40% of the loans default on monthly payments, but there are very few cases of non-payment.

3
Section III : The intervention of Development

① Mithila folk paintings have the distinction of being one of the rare low-cost, indigenous art products to gain international recognition in a short span of 2-3 years, and to emerge as a significant source of income generation. The story of the sensitive intervention by official agencies, their restrained yet hard-sell marketing strategy, role of private traders, etc. is presented in the following paragraphs.

(i) Genesis: Mithila ^{Hand}paintings invaded the world art scene almost overnight as a result of the intensive development programme mounted jointly by two all-India organisations, in co-operation with Bihar State promotional agencies. The central organisations were the Handloom and Handicraft Export Corporation¹ (HHEC) and the All India Handicrafts Board² (AIHB). The year was 1966.

1 See Appendix 2 for summary of HHEC

2 See Appendix 1 for summary of AIHB

3/ Prior to this, art connoisseurs had 'discovered' the dramatic wall paintings of the Mithila villages, including W.G. Archer, English historian and sociologist who toured the villages in the early decades of the present century. Later, in the 1930's, ² an ascetic Bihari artist* travelled in the area and experimented with the transfer of the motifs on paper by the women artists. He returned to the villages often, and collected enough paintings to hold an exhibition of this work in Patna in the 1950's.

At about this time a craft-expert** visited Mithila to witness the rich art tradition for herself. Her record of this visit, "I was dismayed to find that the glory to which Archer referred had seemingly vanished. The bleak dust of poverty had sapped the will and the surplus energy needed to ornament the home. The walls were blank or oleographs and calenders hung in the gosainchars¹. There were only traces of old paintings here and there - fragments that bore testimony to the existence of powerful streams of inherited knowledge of colour, form and iconography". ✓

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- ✓ * Mr. U. Maharathi (who joined the Bihar Cottage Industries Department)
 - ✓ ** Mrs Pupul Jayakar (who was later Chairman of HHEC)
 - ✓ 1 Gosainchar: prayer room

(ii) The initial stimulus:

The years 1966-67 represent a bench-mark in the commercial development of Mithila folk paintings. Drought and famine conditions prevailed over most of north Bihar, and people of the drought-prone districts in Mithila were in acute distress. Famine relief schemes were launched throughout the area. One of the elements of the relief programme was to provide employment so that purchasing power could be injected into the poorest, poverty-ridden sections. Handicrafts were identified as an appropriate avenue of employment, since they were based on local skills, local raw materials and low investment, and did not impose a physical burden on the starving population.

A joint team of experts from the AIHB, HHEC and Bihar State Small Industries Department toured the area. The group consisted of experts in rural development, fine art, handicrafts, marketing, administration. The field survey team decided to select those items or skills which would have a high value-added and wage component, so that the needy received government aid in the form of earnings, and

not as dole. The crafts which were identified at the time for intensive development were Mithila folk paintings, Sikki grass items, bamboo ware.

The chronology of events related to the commercial evolution of Mithila folk paintings has not been documented, and the details furnished above might be challenged in respect of sequence. But there is unanimity of opinion about the objectives with which the handicrafts and folk art development programme was launched in the Mithila area in 1966-67 viz. to benefit the poorest households in North Bihar through the promotion of their traditional crafts. The concepts of 'benefit' was largely economic, and the 'promotion' of the craft included the strengthening of both the production and marketing structures. From the beginning, the quest was to identify a marketable product or service which the poorest households could supply in their own environment without large capital outlays by the organisers.

The HHRC undertook to spearhead the development programme for Mithila craftsmen. They posted a field officer, Shri Bhaskar Kulkarni, to Madhubani in the summer of '66 (see accompanying Profile of Kulkarni). This ^{appointment} appears to have been an inspired move, ~~and one which~~ proved crucial to the ~~uninterrupted~~ evolution of the art, which was market-bound for the first time.

Kulkarni was ~~the~~ ~~unconventional~~ ~~flower~~ ~~struck~~, an anomaly in the stereotyped bureaucratic milieu. Sporting a flowing beard and long hair (which gave him ~~with~~ a visual similarity to the hirsute Tantric priests of the area) Kulkarni cycled 60 kms out of Madhubani town to villages in the famine belt. He explained his mission to the men of some high status Brahmin villages where the skill of painting was highly developed. Their reaction was hostile. The prospect of allowing their women to communicate with a stranger was as abhorrent as the implication that they would live off their wives' earnings. They considered it more honourable to starve to death. Kulkarni was chased out of these villages.

Respecting the status-related resistance of the higher caste Brahmin villages, he selected Jitwarpur, a village which was severely hit by the drought. This village had a large population of Mahapatra Brahmins, the lowest of the 5 Brahmin sub-castes and whose women were accomplished artists. In this village of low status Brahmins, he was welcomed. Men were willing to experiment with any avenue of income generation since their own earnings from death ceremonies had dwindled.

Kulkarni recalls that soon after entering Jitwarpur he was overwhelmed by the feeling that he was gaining more from the encounter than the artists. The small payment for the unreserved transfer of artistic-cum-mystical knowledge appeared an unfair exchange. "Suddenly I understood that I was the needy person. My own need to serve the culture and to learn about it had brought me here". Kulkarni saw the women artists as gifted beings whose art had been thwarted by endless self-denial, and now starvation. With his characteristic sensitivity he plumbed the depths of their "unspent grief and the pain of their inner wounds". All this, without exchanging a word directly with the women.

As an outsider Kulkarni was not allowed beyond the verandah. Men took paper and colours which he distributed, ~~to the men~~ and gave them to the women artists. He gave his instructions to the men, always conscious of "her" who was listening anxiously, watching from behind the broken walls of the house.

The men were disinterested in Kulkarni's artistic message and his veneration for the art form. They were dispirited and escaped the reality of the famine by talking to him about great Mithila kings of the past. Meditation and bhang were the focus of their existence.

1. ref. Conversations with Bhaskar Kulkarni at 155, New Delhi
3rd - 14th July, 1978.

All paintings were purchased from the artists by Kulkarni and fresh paper was provided. These paintings were dispatched to the HHEC head office in New Delhi. In the early months almost 90% of the paintings were destroyed¹ and only a small proportion of quality paintings was retained for the market as explained later so that only the finest product would be exposed to the public.

Kulkarni remained in Jitwarpur for 9 months, and this marked the period of ~~the~~ intensive involvement of HHEC in the folk paintings project. During this time the framework of organised procurement and marketing of paintings evolved. The artist households, who had no prior experience of dealing with accounts and production schedules, started learning the skill from the artist officers of HHEC and the State Cottage Industries Department. Their patience and warmth instilled confidence and enthusiasm in the withdrawn artists, and this was the single most important factor in raising a cadre of dependable artists in the villages.

In the winter of 1967 the first large-scale exhibition of Mithila paintings was held in New Delhi jointly by HHEC and the Central Cottage Industries Emporium at the Kunika Chemould Art Gallery. The exhibits received enthusiastic press publicity. Soon after some exhibits were also taken to the Montreal Expo Fair of 1967, and thus the paintings were 'introduced' to the international market.

1 Ref. Officials of HHEC in conversation with ISS research associate, June 1977.

After the first year or so, the 'Madhubani project' ceased to be a relief project. HHEC withdrew Kulkarni from the field in 1967, and thereafter it started applying commercial criteria to the purchase and sale of paintings. As interest in Mithila paintings was stimulated abroad, HHEC concentrated on creating a place for the product amongst the fine art representations of indigenous art.

Other agencies such as the AIHB and the BSSIC deployed their field personnel to build a reliable supply line, so that demand would be met in respect of quality and time specifications. These officers worked out of Patna, Varanasi or New Delhi, and no field centre was established in the Mithila area for the first 6 years after the paintings were discovered for the commercial market.

(iii) The Institutions

MSEC: In 1972 the All India Handicrafts Board set up a Marketing and Service Extension Centre (MSEC) in Madhubani town with the objective of coordinating the facilities extended to the artist by agencies of the central and Bihar governments. Their services included marketing, credit, product design and innovation, durability, supply of raw materials, quality control, etc. Constitutionally the MSEC is committed to "generating employment opportunities and increasing present earnings of poor artisans by improving marketability and promoting markets for their goods". The MSEC is headed by an Assistant Director, and has a technical

staff of three, including a field officer, a Technical Assistant (Marketing) and a Designer. The centre also has a clerk and peon¹.

HHEC
Regional
Purchase
Office

In 1974 the HHEC opened a regional purchase office in Patna for the procurement of Mithila paintings and sikki ware. Mr. U. Maharathi, who had retired from State service, was appointed the regional representative. However, the office was closed after two years in 1976 as international demand for paintings shrank, and the administrative expense of a purchase office could not be justified.

At present the MSEC is the only development agency located in the Mithila area, and all major marketing agencies, based in New Delhi or Patna, operate through it.

Mithila

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- 1 The installation of the MSEC in Madhubani town has been interpreted by some as a political ploy by an influential politician who represented the district in Parliament at the time and sought to be projected as the force behind the paintings boom. It is also reported that attempts were made in the '71 elections to lure women voters by promising daily earnings of Rs. 10 through paintings to each adult female.

(14) Artists' links with development agencies: In the Mithila villages the household is the unit of production. Each artist household is a discrete entrepreneurial unit and is recognised as such by marketing agencies, private buyers, credit institutions, training schemes etc.

For the artist households the most prominent official organisation is the MSEC. They are in daily contact with the Centre for information about the purchase programme of buying agencies. The MSEC serves as an informal headquarters of marketing, and is the venue of bulk purchases by the official purchasing agencies. There are four major official agencies which buy paintings through the MSEC viz. the EHEC (for export sales), the Central Cottage Industries (for retail sales through its emporia), and two Bihar state organisations -- the Bihar State Export Corporation (BSEC), and the Bihar State Handloom, Powerloom, Handicrafts Development Corporation (BSHPHDC).

Each of these agencies sends a Purchasing Committee comprising departmental buyers and experts to Madhubani periodically (although the frequency of such purchases has declined sharply in 1977 and '78), following an advance notice to MSEC about the targeted magnitude and quality of purchases. The MSEC informs the artists in Jitwarpur, Ranti and adjoining villages of the details of the impending visit. The announcement is not formal and the community learns of the visit. The venue for the buyers' meet

is the MSEC building and interested artists (both men and women) take their paintings here. Cash payment is made on the spot to the artists by the representatives of the purchasing agencies. Paintings worth Rs. 10,000 were commonly purchased at these meets until 1974; since then the purchases have been much smaller.

For smaller requirements the purchasing agencies send an expert to the villages. In this case purchases are made directly from the artists in their homes. The buyer is usually accompanied by a staff member of the MSEC. News of the arrival of a buyer in the village is transmitted quickly, and within minutes several artists roll out a sample of their paintings for the visitor. In this manner every artist has access to the buyer, although only the talented artists might be able to sell regularly.

In the artists' perception the MSEC is a symbol of official authority with powers over the magnitude of purchases, supply of credit, selection of artists for awards, recommendation for out-of-town assignments etc. They tend to regard the centre as a non-partisan institution which is genuinely interested in promoting employment of craftsmen. A professional tool-room relationship has emerged between the Centre and the artists. Both as a cause and a result, the Centre does not involve itself with welfare or social consciousness raising programmes, and neither do the artists look up to the Centre as a potential change agent in their social lives.

1 ref 155 field Survey

Section 4: Marketing - the central pivot

(i) Official agencies

The commercial success of Mithila paintings has hinged on the sophisticated marketing strategy and techniques adopted by HHEC and the other developmental agencies. From the earliest stages the paintings were introduced as a component of the artistic tradition of India, and an exponent of the country's cultural heritage. Professional expertise was used in publicising the 'new' find, in enforcing strict quality control, and in establishing a steady supply line - all of which contributed in making Mithila paintings popular, both abroad and at home.

Quality Control

Foremost, the organisers ensured that only the finest quality paintings were displayed so that the newly aroused interest of buyers was sustained. ^{The defects were often burnt at the HHEC office in New Delhi.} This was a precaution against the emergence of a parallel supply line of shoddy paintings in the domestic market. The paintings were destroyed discreetly so that the artists would not learn of it.

Display in art forums

The world's prestigious art display forums were selected for introducing Mithila paintings, despite their 'folk' genre. The paintings were displayed at the Museum of Fine Art in Paris, art exhibitions in New York, Indian 'cultural' exhibitions in Rio de Janeiro and Osaka (Expo '70). Later, the paintings were displayed in prominent department stores in USA (Bloomingdales, New York), Switzerland (Globe, Munich) etc. Characteristic of

the restrained marketing strategy, the paintings were displayed as art, but not offered for sale.

Such aesthetic displays stimulated interest in the art world, and several art journals and other popular magazines with wide circulation carried art features on Mithila paintings. These helped to catapult the paintings into the critical eye of connoisseurs and wholesale art buyers.

Art
buyers

On the strength of its trade network in Europe and USA, HHEC established contact with museums, art collectors, department stores. The advance publicity had already aroused interest and acceptance of the paintings. Wholesale buyers in Europe, USA, S. America and Africa booked orders, and export of paintings got under way.

HHEC
Retail
Shops

HHEC also used its own retail shops in New York, Paris, Nairobi and Tokyo for displaying paintings. The bulk of the

exports were to France, UK, Germany where the G.S.P. system prevailed^s for Indian imports. No duty was levied on Indian imports. In the U.S. where also a significant proportion of exports were routed, hand-made paintings attracted a duty of 10%.

Shipment

For the initial export shipments Air India provided concessional haulage rates. Paintings enjoyed an advantage over other bulkier crafts in transportation since they could be neatly rolled and efficiently packaged in insulated plywood boxes. The ease of packaging has contributed significantly to establishing the product in foreign markets.

Publicity

Imaginative brochures and publicity literature on Mithila paintings was prepared in the New Delhi office and circulated to MHEC buyers abroad. In the winter of '74, HHEC greeted 500 of its buyers with specially-made Mithila paintings, packed in cylinders, like scrolls. Each packet contained an explanatory card on the painting. The pay-off on this was high, and numerous buyers who had missed the trade publicity, picked up the product. After 1971, HHEC greeting cards routinely bore miniature Mithila cut-outs. In '71, '72, '73 the cards were of 6" x 6" size reusable as small Mithila panels.

Publicity costs

According to estimates of the HHEC publicity department, the total outlay on promotion of Mithila paintings in the period 1973-74 in the form of greeting cards, brochures, gifts of painting, distribution of notebooks etc. was Rs. 18,000. In the next four years, 1973-78 the expenditure on promotion was Rs. 7,000. These estimates do not include the outlay on exhibitions and displays abroad.

Pricing

On the average HHEC exported each painting at \$4 fob, which was double the purchase price of Rs. 12-16 in the village. The average retail price abroad was approximately \$16. A four-way pricing system was evolved by some of the early organisers, including Mr Maharathi, and this endures to the present day. Paintings are graded as 'A', 'B', 'C' or 'D' depending on a combination of attributes viz. originality of design, decorative value, colour rythm, and the artist's reputation. Grades are assigned at the time of purchase by the Assistant Director of MSEC or other persons such as Mr Maharathi who are recognised by the artists as knowledgeable & non-partisan assessors. Prices

of different grades of paintings are shown below:

		(1977)
<u>Grade</u>		<u>Sale price in Jitwarpur (Rs.)</u>
<u>Colour Paintings</u>		
(22" x 30")	A	12
	B	8
	C	6
	C	4
<u>Line drawings</u>		<u>Sale price in Ranti (Rs.)</u>
	A	35
	B	20

The institution of the grading system facilitated purchases by bulk buyers, but it also led to under-grading by unscrupulous middle-men. Since grading is based on qualitative assessment, it provided a method of exploitation of artisans who often resorted to panic sales when their paintings were adjudged sub-standard by the middleman.

National Awards

The Government of India gave national prominence to Mithila paintings by awarding the prestigious National Award for craftsmen¹ to ~~Sita Devi~~ ^{Jagdamba Devi} in 1970. Elevation to the status of a nationally

1 The award was instituted in 1965 by the All India Handicrafts Board to honour excellence in craftsmanship. It carries an honorarium of Rs. 2,500.

feted craft reinforced interest both within the country and abroad for Mithila paintings. In the following years other Mithila painters have won the award, the last, Ganga Devi ^{from village Rasidpur} in 1976.

The steady build-up of Mithila paintings by HHEC proved spectacularly successful. In the period 1968-74, exports through HHEC amounted to ~~Rs. 10 lakhs~~ ^{approximately Rs. 10 lakhs}.

In addition to paintings for sale, artists also received commissions for on-site mural paintings in hotels, airports, railway stations in several Indian cities. Government-owned hotels of the India Tourism Development Corporation (I.T.D.C.) such as the Akbar in New Delhi and Pataliputra in Patna have made intensive use of Mithila motifs and paintings in their interior decor. Airports and railway stations in several northern cities also have Mithila murals. Well-known designers and decorations ^{etc} such as ~~Patna~~ ~~India~~ ~~of~~ ~~HHEC~~ collaborated with ITDC and played a crucial role in introducing Mithila in the interiors of important public buildings in numerous cities.

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- 1 There are no authentic records of actual production or exports of Mithila paintings. The AIHB furnishes statistics of handicrafts exports to the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS), which in turn records the exports of Mithila paintings under a motely group (code 896.100 of the Revised India Trade Classification) which includes "all pintings, drawings etc. executed by hand". This category includes several genres of hand-paintings such as the Nathdwara painting of Rajasthan, Pichwai of ^{Govindgarh, Rajasthan} ~~Deodhar~~, Kalamkari of Andhra Pradesh, Mithila Paintings etc. In respect of domestic sales, the A IHB has not maintained a record of sales even through official agencies; private sales have naturally not been documented.

Domestic
Marketing

Although paintings developed as an export product, destined for art lovers in foreign countries, the organising agencies attempted to introduce it to the domestic market from the earliest stages. In the days when Kulkarni was collecting the paintings in the Madhubani villages, a proportion of the collection was routed to the government-owned Super Bazar in New Delhi for sale (the practice was discontinued later) on account of poor demand in the general store. A part was also sent to the Central Cottage Industries Emporium (CCIE) for retail in its emporia at Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay and Bangalore, and these remain important retailers of paintings in the present.

Two state level organisations are also actively involved with marketing of Mithila paintings in the domestic market. These are the Bihar State Handloom, Powerloom and Handicraft Development Corporation (BSHPHDC) and the Bihar State Small Industries Corporation (BSSIC). These agencies retail the paintings through a network of show rooms and emporia in Bihar and other cities of the country. BSHPHDC emporia are located in the Bihar towns of Patna, Darbhanga, Begusarai, Fanchi and Bokaro. The BSSIC retails paintings at Bihar state emporia in New Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Ranchi and Patna. Occasionally, the BSHPHDC makes purchases on behalf of other official agencies such as the BSSIC, CCIE etc. In this case BSHPHDC levies a 10 per cent service charge on the organisation for which it buys the paintings. Parity is maintained

Appendix 3 presents a flow chart of the
sations dealing with Mithila paintings in the country, both
for indigenous sales and export.

Relaxation
of supply

As the product became internationally known and also appreciated in the domestic market, HHEC relaxed its policy of exclusive and restricted supply of Mithila paintings. There was a trend towards introducing products that combined utility with decorative value. Thus there was a proliferation of the Mithila motif on notebooks, diaries, writing pads, desk calendars, greeting cards, scarves, table mats. Designers at HHEC introduced new uses for the folk motifs, and also experimented with variations in the size of paintings.

The innovations in product and design had mixed repercussions on the market. On the one hand the diversification widened the market, but at the same time the profusion of Mithila 'stuff' eroded its novelty. Foreign markets became saturated and there was a decline in interest in Mithila paintings.

The taut and tightly-reined marketing strategy of HHEC seemed to have been ideally suited for commercialisation of the folk art. With a dilution of the exclusive marketing strategy,

the product appeared to lose grip over the market. Thus there is the paradox of a decline in demand even when the artist's expertise -- in terms of colour, design and finish -- has improved considerably. This seeming contradiction underscores the importance of marketing technique in the commercial success of Mithila paintings.

The Mithila experience would seem to suggest that the demand for an art product or craft item is a function of its quality, the quality of product promotion, and the maintenance of a dependable supply line. ✓

(i) Private trade: It is estimated that about 60% of the total sales of Mithila paintings are conducted through private channels. The impetus provided by the marketing success of HNSC, and the institutional support extended by AIHB attracted private entrepreneurs of many interests viz. exporters of handicrafts, dealers in handicrafts for domestic sales, representatives of foreign wholesale/retail organisations, foreign buyers for art museums, private foreign traders, tourists etc. Within a short period the artists developed independent links with private traders, and either sold paintings in the village, or took their work to dealers in various cities.

Significantly, the MSEC and representatives of HNSC and other official organisations encouraged the entry of private traders in

the marketing of Mithila paintings. Private buyers brought with them the diverse contacts of their own markets, and offered a steady demand which would supplement official attempts at probing new markets.

With the advent of private ^{trade,} commission agents emerged. These agents, some of whom belonged to the villages, exploited the artists by under payment or non-payment for paintings. Typically, a middleman would collect the work of many artists and then leave for Varanasi, New Delhi or other north Indian cities to supply them to private dealers. On his return to the village he would report 'less' of some paintings or quote fictitious selling prices to the artists. Middlemen continue to operate in the villages and control a significant proportion of private trade. Established artists too fall prey to the agents, who brow-beat the artists into lowering prices on grounds of quality, which is difficult to establish. Sales depend entirely on the strength of the contact with the middlemen. Since paintings, unlike a consumer durable like khadi, can only be assessed subjectively, earnings are not ensured by the mere act of production. Complex relationships have to be cultivated to win a share of the private trade in paintings. Consequently the artist households set a high value by maintaining their

association with official buyers. Artists continue to sell through middlemen because they provide a marketing outlet which supplements sales to official agencies. For the lower-order artists who have not succeeded in selling regularly to official agencies, the middlemen represents the sole marketing outlet.

Private traders, both foreign and Indian, usually sell at phenomenal mark-ups to the dealer/wholesaler/retailer, whatever their initial purchase price in the village. It is learnt, for instance, that a painting which was bought for Rs. 40 in Jitwarpur was sold for Fr 3000 in Paris. The Gift Shop at the University of Pennsylvania sells Mithila paintings for \$150. Some London galleries price the paintings at £ 200.¹ An ^{English} ~~Indian~~ trader was able to commute monthly between Europe and Madhubani for a year on the ~~strength of the~~ profits he earned from his trade in the paintings.

Local traders purchase the paintings at very low rates, sometimes less than Rs. 3 per piece, and sell them for at least Rs. 9 to the dealer. The dealer's/wholesaler's mark-up ranges from 25% to 50%.²

Official agencies have not intervened to correct the rampant trends in private trade network due to three reasons, first, the operations of the middlemen are subtle and difficult to nail down;

1 All India Radio, National Programme of Talks, Interview with Dr Raymond L. Owens, Social Anthropologists by Mrs Devaki Jain, "Our Village" (2), broadcast on December 23, 1977.

2. ref. ISS field survey; for artists selling price the source is conversations of ISS research associate with Sita Devi and Jannara Devi (New Delhi, February 1978); for wholesalers/dealers mark up the source is Ma Maharathi (Patna, June 1977)

second, there is acceptance of the middlemen in the community of artists due to their ethnic affinity or kinship with the artists; and third, in the present conditions of declining demand they continue to provide a trickle of orders all round the year and a living wage to some artists.

Since 1977 a novel off-shoot of private trade has emerged. Some leading artists, prominent among them is Sita Devi (National Awardee), have taken up ^{semi-} permanent residence in metropolitan areas such as New Delhi and work out of these cities. The women are accompanied by their husbands or grown sons. The family rents or shares a room, often with a village contact who holds a salaried job in the city, and they obtain commissions from private and official organisations for paintings or decorating buildings by mural painting. This is an interesting case of art reaching for the market. But it carries within it the danger of a sterile compromise with the market, for uprooted from the rhythm of rural life which generates this art, the quality of work might become synthetic. This urban-based 'rural art' would have the market at the doorstep, and therefore ^{could} exert a crucial influence on market assessment of Mithila paintings and demand for them. X

(iii) Cost of development efforts: Costing a grant-turned-commercial project can at best be a crude estimational exercise which provides an indication of the financial resources required in sparking a 'latent craft' alive. Its importance lies in comparability with

other development or employment schemes, especially for home-bound women workers.

In terms of cost analysis, two phases of the project can be identified. In the first phase, 1966-68, the sponsoring agencies supported the project on a distress grant basis. In the 24 month period, September '66 to August '68, the combined investment of HHEC, AIHB and the Bihar State agencies was approximately Rs. 4 lakhs.¹ This amount included the purchase of paintings, salaries to field personnel, orientation training to selected artists, organisation of exhibitions, participation in trade-fairs etc.

In 1973 the state government made a lumpsum grant of Rs. 1500 each to 150 artists, or a total grant of Rs. 2.25 lakhs, on the recommendation of MSEC personnel. The grant was provided to enable the artists to secure their production base. But most of it was used by the beneficiaries for other uses, such as repayment of debt, house construction and repair, expenditure on marriages, etc.

In the period following the 'grant' phase, AIHB incurred a major development expenditure by setting up the Marketing Service Extension Centre (MSEC) at Madhubani. The capital outlay of the AIHB in establishing the MSEC was approximately Rs. 15,000 (which included advance on rent, and purchase of fixtures and fittings.)

¹ Estimate based on individual cost data provided by HHEC, AIHB and BSHPHDC. All the data was aggregative and tentative. 60

The overheads amounted to Rs.4,500 per month, including staff salaries, travel, organising exhibitions, training programmes etc. The annual variable cost of running the MSEC is Rs. 50-55 thousand, disaggregated as below :

Estimated financial outlay on MSEC: fixed and variable costs

1. Fixed cost

Rental of building (6 months), furniture, fittings etc.	<u>10,000</u>
	<u>10,000</u>

2. Variable cost (annual)

Salaries	42,000
Travel	1,000
Rent	300
Exhibitions, Training programmes, product promotion measures	<u>10,000</u>
	<u>53,300</u>

The MSEC caters to the development requirements of 11 other crafts in Mithila, in addition to folk paintings. Therefore the expenses shown above are not entirely attributable to paintings, although this has emerged as the leading export of the area. For ease of estimation, however, if the entire cost of the MSEC, including variable costs and interest on fixed capital, is attributed to the development of paintings, the capital: output ratio is 1:4. This rough estimate is derived from the average output of the 200-odd painters, who rely on MSEC for operational and sales support. Their

MSEC combined output is presently approximately Rs. 2 - 2.5 lakhs per annum.

Analysis of production costs, which are borne by the artists themselves, shows that the craft has a narrow capital base. On the average, raw material costs of a painting are 17% - 20% of its sale value (disaggregated, the raw material costs are distributed thus : paper - 10%, colour - 5%, gum - 3%). Fixed costs to the artist are negligible, since he requires almost no hardware except perhaps a steel trunk for storing the painted rolls of paper. Value added by labour is about 80% of the fob value of the painting, almost all of which accrues to the artist in the case of sales to official agencies. However, when sales are made to private buyers through middlemen, the latter corner a large proportion of the artists' just remuneration.

On the average, an artist who sells paintings worth Rs. 1000 in the year, has a working capital requirement of about Rs. 200-225. The artists finance their working capital requirements on the basis of their sales. ~~Recently, however,~~ Institutional credit has been offered by the State Bank of India ^{recently} under its Preferential Interest Scheme, ^{as mentioned earlier.} In 1976-77 the Madhubani branch of the State Bank of India extended loans worth Rs. 48,000 to 195 artists in Jitwarpur and Ranti. ~~None of these loans were instrumental in interest-adding to the artists' income.~~

The loans range between Rs. 150-400, and are furnished on the basis of group collateral.

In order to provide an indication of the development cost of a hypothetical community of Mithila artists, numbering 300 painters, a rough estimate has been constructed from the costing figures obtained during the ISS field survey.

Estimated financial outlay on commercial development of a community of 300 Mithila artists

A Central coordinating/promotional agency of the state or central government	
(i) Fixed cost	Rs.15,000
(ii) Annual recurring cost	Rs.55,000
<hr/>	
B Production costs of 300 artists	
(i) Fixed cost for tin/aluminium box for storage of paintings Rs.30 x 300	Rs. 9,000
(ii) Working Capital :	
Raw materials	Rs.23,000
Colour	Rs.12,500
Gum	Rs. 8,300
Other expenses including interest charges	Rs. 2,000
	<u>Rs.54,800</u>

The average annual production of 300 artists would be about 3 - 3.5 lakhs. Computing from the above estimates,

the average cost of providing employment to a Mithila painter at daily earnings of Rs. 3, is likely to be about Rs 1.25 per day in the first year, assuming all expenses of the development centre and raw material requirements of the artists for the first year would be met by the government. Subsequently, the artisans would be able to finance themselves from their earnings since the average turnaround period ranges from about 1 to 6 weeks. Thus the cost of employment would ~~shrink~~^{be reduced} to Re 0.46-0.50 per artist per day, which would represent the running costs of the development centre.

Section
Chapter 5 : Impact

~~...all the changes which have been induced~~
~~...~~
~~...~~
~~...~~
...but also because of problems of measurement and classification. There are unquantifiable trade-offs between well-being and income, success and competition, renown and frustration, all of which obscure the answer to the question, Has commercialisation benefited the women artists? and their community?

Impact on women artists: The ability to earn an income within the given social framework has clearly enhanced women's status. Women reported during the survey that the income from painting had won them recognition in the family and community beyond their ritual status of wife, daughter, grandmother etc. They have been transformed from the 'dependent partner' into an important contributor to the family income. This fact alone has endowed the women with a certain distinction and esteem.

There is a decline in the incidence of wife-beating which is a manifestation of the 'coming out' of the repressed female in Mithila. As in other parts of the country, violence

on the wife is often sparked off by the husband's unreasoned heeding of complaints against her by his mother and others in the family. The Mithila male seems to have paused to consider the wisdom of this in the light of her unexpected economic significance. In some households joint wife-husband artist teams have formed; one sketching, the other colouring. ~~Gender-
relationships, which are becoming more and more cemented marital relationships.~~

~~The change in fortunes of an artist, Ganga Devi's story provides a poignant illustration of the impact of~~ ~~depression and the effects of the Mithila boom.~~ ~~Commercialisation of Mithila paintings. Rejected because she~~ ~~was~~ ~~was~~ was barren, Ganga Devi chafed under a life of physical want and emotional unhappiness in her husband's home in village Rasidpur. After seven years of marriage her sister-in-law, wife of her husband's brother, encouraged him to remarry. When the second wife came to the house, Ganga Devi left for her natal village, Ranti.

Here she took an unusual step for a married woman — she sought diksha (initiation vows) and became a sadhu of the Vaishnav sect of Hindus. ~~Her life became intensely religious and~~ ~~more~~. She subsisted on the scant earnings from paintings which she was just beginning to learn from Mahasundari Devi, a well-known Kayastha painter of Ranti. Gradually Ganga Devi's paintings took on an ethereal radiance. Discovery of Ganga Devi the artist

was heralded as a major event by officials of HHEC and state agencies. Since then her paintings have won her many awards and brought wealth. "Five years ago I didn't have a wrap for the winter, and I used a straw mat for covering myself. Today I have six shawls".

The Madhubani MSEC made her incharge of a training school for artists in Rasidpur, her husband's village. She returned to the village covered in glory — wealth, and a name as a saint-artist. He urged her to stay in his house where she stays now as a sadhu. She readily agreed to the enrolment of her ~~mother-in-law~~ sister-in-law as a trainee, and has helped the woman at a critical period in her life. In the village Ganga Devi's story is cited as an instance of divine reward for a pious life through the bounty of painting.

In the artist households, the supplementary income has caused an improved revision in standards of food consumption.¹ The frequency of meals and the quantities eaten have both increased, although there is no impact on the nutritious value of food since the dietary composition remains unchanged.

A part of the women's income is also spent on higher education for boys² — one artist has put three sons through college on her earnings from paintings. But there are no changes in

1. ref ISS field Survey: Conversations with women artists, June 72

2. ref ISS field Survey: Conversations with women artists June

respect of the low value assigned to girls' education. Women artists view education for girls with disfavour because of the irrelevance of the school curriculum for earning an income, the fact that it interferes with the girls' participation in domestic work, and also because it jeopardises chances of finding suitable grooms who must necessarily be more literate than their brides.

Restoration of family lands has been financed in part by the earnings from painting, which has thereby generated a second round of stable income. House construction and repairs are now within reach of the family budget, so that calamities such as house collapse need no longer be endured without help.

Five of the leading women artists have fixed deposit accounts in Madhubani banks. Although the savings are small, tremendous prestige has accrued to them on account of their ^{bank} savings with organised ~~financial institutions~~.

Aesthetically, the commercial recognition of Mithila paintings has brought a greater meaning and fulfilment to the women artists. Admiration from badka log, the important people viz. officials, tourists, well-wishers, has freed the hand and eye of hesitation. The stark lines of the famine and drought years have yielded to a colour-filled fertility. As one artist observed, "Paints are streaming out of my courtyard today, where yesterday there was caked earth. My mind is full of wild colours, and picture-ideas race through the head all the time. I have no time for grief."

1. ref: 155 field survey: Remark by Bana Devi, artist of village Sitwarpur to (68) research associate, June 1977.

The women are self-assured and confident as artists and proud of the signature that they put on their paintings. They explain their themes animatedly to visitors, offering well-thought out explanations for seeming inconsistencies in interpretation of a mythological incident¹, or application of colour².

However, improvement in status appears to be a purely income-related phenomenon which may last only as paintings generate income. There does not appear to be an enduring improvement in future prospects for female artists in terms of integration in the developing ^{next} process. The community seems to consider it unnecessary to upgrade the quality of the women's lives through inputs of education, health, nutrition etc. and does not associate these inputs with their ability to perform as painters. The women themselves concur with this, and hold the view that their personal requirements are low priority.

Impact on the Community: Annually Rs 2.5-3 lakhs have been funnelled into each of the two villages, Jitwarpur and Ranti, in the last decade by buyers, both official agencies and private buyers from home and abroad. A large proportion of this has been spent in the village itself on food, house repair and construction, purchase of land etc. There is visual evidence of this prosperity in relation to other villages in the neighbourhood. More children are clothed, more adults are shod, more

1 For instance, Baua Devi has depicted the Matsyavatar, the divine part-human-part-fish incarnation of Lord Vishnu as Lord Vishnu in his full form inside the stomach of a large fish. She finds this more credible than the half human and half fish form.

2 The face, hands and feet of deity are often painted in different colours - blue, yellow, red, according to the functions assigned to the limbs of the deity in the depiction.

eyes are healthy. Homesteads appear to be somewhat more sturdy and reinforced; some village lands are cropped with high yielding varieties of food-grains which have been introduced on an experimental basis by well-wishers.

The influx of visitors from other parts of the country and abroad has brought fragments of the world to these forgotten villages. The venturesome among the villagers have gained a foot-hold in the cities through the visiting buyers and art experts. A few artists have sojourned in the USA, USSR, Europe as guests of Indian and foreign governments. These visits have acted to question the moribund values of the community. At times there is a hint that the travels of a few are infecting the rest of the community with contemporary values such as the non-observance of strict traditions in respect of inter-caste dining and inter-class social contact. For instance, Sita Devi accommodated in her New Delhi room the Scheduled Caste family of Jamuna Devi for three nights in summer '78. This enabled Jamuna Devi to see the city after a prolonged stay at the rural art workshop, Naika, situated 20 kms from Delhi. This event has divided the community into approvers and condemners, but has at least set a precedent.

A negative by-product of the Mithila boom has been the creation of a sociological divide between the successful and

ordinary artists. The meteoric rise of a few artists looms as an uncomfortable and unattainable reference point for the rest of the community of artists. Their prominence and celebrity status seems to have belittled the minor achievements of the others who comprise the majority. The latter have developed a fatalism about the fact that the lion's share of the market will go to the 'famous few'. They are not convinced about the superior skill of their peers, and suggest the use of cunning by them to win fame. A certain resentment against the successful artists exists in the community which admires and envies them.

A city import into Jitwarapur and Ranti is an uncontrolled consumerism. There is a rampant demand for wrist watches, multi-brand transistors, synthetic clothing, bicycles, etc. Sometimes this is indulged in by the males of well-off artist households at the expense of necessities¹ such as expenditure on food, medical care, children's education etc.

Because of the fluctuations in demand for paintings in the last decade, uncertainty and doubt pervade the community of artists, who feel incompetent to reinvigorate demand on their own.

In sum, the success of paintings has torpedoed the villages of Mithila out of anonymity and want, and brought dignity to some women as artists and members of society. Other crafts of the area

1 Ref. ISS field survey : conversation of Mahasundari Devi of village Ranti with research associate.

have also moved into the limelight - sikki ware, bamboo baskets, traditional embroidery, lac items etc. How enduring this change proves to be, however, remains a question mark.

Section 6 : Investigation by Researchers - a novel experience

The locus of Mithila paintings in the last 10 years is an inverted U-curve. A steady increase in demand in the first seven years, 1967-73, has been followed by a period of declining demand in the subsequent 5-year period, 1974-78. This trend has been monitored anxiously by the artists, and watched by promoters, organisers and researchers. The future course of growth is likely to be determined largely by fresh intervention, and an impetus seems to have been provided already by researchers.

In the post-'66 years there have been several scholars who have visited the Mithila villages with research interests ranging from the purely artistic to a study of the impact of the 'Mithila boom' on sociological behaviour. Three or four scholars are prominent in this group - Erika Moser, social anthropologist from W. Germany who lived in the Jitwarpur village for 4 months in the period, 1973-74; Yves Vequaud from France who has stayed in the villages to make films on Mithila art; Dr. Raymond Owens, social anthropologist from USA, who resided in Jitwarpur for a 12-month period December '76 to November '77; and Gauri Mishra, Maithila scholar and university teacher who is a resident of nearby Darbhanga town. Other young scholars, most of them from universities in Bihar, have also done research work in the Mithila area.

Some of these scholars have felt drawn to the people of these villages, and also disturbed by the negative by-products of commercialisation of art which have made the community of artists insecure and vulnerable to external market-induced fluctuations in demand. Two of them, Moser and Owens, have evolved programmes for the future development of the people, the area and the art, in association with Indian counterparts.

The objective of the scholar-activists is to formulate an over-all programme of rural development for the villages and simultaneously to preserve the tradition of art and culture, centred around the concept of maximisation of benefit to the artists. They foresee a long-term involvement in the villages, including prolonged physical presence, to develop Jitwarpur as a kind of model village which offers its people a stable livelihood with dignity, and its women a chance to demonstrate their art to an appreciative world-wide audience.

Their programmes consist of two broad components, income-enhancement in agriculture and the creation of non-agricultural sources of employment, and promotion of the art tradition including protection of the artists' interest.

Some segments of the economic programme have been activated in the last 3-4 years. For instance, guidance from the team, and through them, the intervention of the sub-Divisional Agricultural Officer, has encouraged 3 farmers to adopt green revolution technology on their foodgrains crops. This had a

demonstration effect when in a year of drought, these crops flourished while others failed. Another 5 farmers have taken to banana cultivation, and are expecting to earn Rs. 10-50,000 per acre, which is nearly 30 times their earnings from traditional subsistence farming. Other farmers from neighbouring villages have also made enquiries about banana cultivation.

Consolidation of land holdings is also being attempted by the team. One acre is commonly fragmented into 7 or 8 units, each belonging to a different owner. This prevents efficient land utilisation. The team proposes to purchase half a dozen 2-3 acre plots in the village, and then to use these holdings as trading stock for their consolidation plan.

In respect of creating additional employment opportunities, the team has already activated a forgotten state scheme for providing buffaloes to landless households. It also proposes to start a dairy scheme, which might be linked to Operation Flood at a later stage. A fine ceramics industry with hand painted Mithila designs and a carpet weaving centre with Mithila motifs is proposed for the area. A furniture making unit using indigenous materials has also been planned for the area. A mango processing plant, which will utilise the major agricultural resource of the area, is also being ^{considered} ~~planned~~.

Jitwaripur is seen by the scholars as a nodal point for the development of rural art and craft in the region. Built on a foundation of agrarian reforms and increased opportunities for wage and self-employment, the envisaged artistic role of Jitwaripur

is a transmission of ideas and services to other villages in the area.

For the art tradition of Mithila, the team has worked out a detailed reinforcement strategy which essentially aims at, one, enriching the environment in which artists live through the construction of schools, libraries, museums as to bring to the artists 'expressions of beauty as great as they give to others'; and two, organising artists into a fraternity which eliminates exploitation and revitalises the art form. At the core of this programme is the conviction that artist households need their own institution, and that the cultural heritage of the area should have its own central point around which to enrich itself, apart from 'delivering' products to the outside world.

The proposed organisation of artists is ^{conceived} ~~conceived~~ as an association of the best artists. Membership ^{of this organisation} is open to women artists who have won National Awards or their equivalent for their skill in Mithila paintings. The researchers' objective ^s of forming such an elitist organisation is to develop a steady invulnerable market for top quality paintings and to return a maximum proportion of the earnings to the artists. Second-grade artists are not expected to receive any direct benefits from the organisation, although indirectly it is claimed they stand to gain from the pricing structure to be adopted by the organisation. The work of the master craftswomen is expected to be retailed at rates considerably higher than the rates at which

such paintings have been sold to date, and this might exert an upward pull on the general price level of paintings made in the villages. Also, a large proportion of the turnover of the organisation (approximately 40%) has been ear-marked for community development projects, such as a museum-cum-hostel building and workshed which can be used during the rains when most mud dwellings leak. These facilities would be available for use by all artists.

A beginning has been made in organising artists by the formation of the Master Craftswomen's Association of Mithila (MCAM), which was informally set up in October 1977. MCAM is expected to generate orders through exhibitions (in the country and abroad), and through the cultivation of personal contacts with art buyers and art galleries abroad.

The MCAM brochure explains the functioning of the organisation representationally through three deities - ardhanarishwaram for the equal importance of men and women in life, Lakshmi for wealth, and Saraswati for learning, art and music.

The executive authority of MCAM rests in the Agent-Secretary, who is currently Gauri Mishra, a ~~member~~.

Section 7 : Emerging Issues

The Mithila paintings project raises some development issues related to handicrafts.

In most traditional economies handicrafts production also supplement the family income from subsistence farming. Based on local raw materials, low investment and hereditary skills, handicrafts offer an opportunity to households across a wide income/resource range to augment income. For the poorest households at levels of marginal existence, the additional income provides a means of survival in the agricultural lean periods. The manufacture of handicrafts allows interspersed effort and home based production which offers a special attraction to women, especially since there is ^{Social} ~~some~~ sanction - whether attitudinal, ideological or physical. *to home based work.*

In India as in other countries with overcrowding in agriculture, employment policy has incorporated handicrafts as an important source of self-employment, particularly for women. The development of crafts and craft-related skills as a means of employment however is charged with dilemmas. For instance, it is pointed out that the production of handicrafts presumes a feudal socio-economic system and a certain 'backwardness' which prevents artisans from learning new skills required for the

growing 'modern' sectors. The practitioners of crafts are thus consigned to an occupation which has tended to be immune to the technological advances of the other sectors. Hence the charge that handicrafts are 'anti-development'.

Too frequently, the commercial market propels crafts away from the ethnic tradition, endangering both the art form and the artists' livelihood, because of mass-production by the craftsmen. Stereotyped and lacking in innovativeness, this trend eliminates artistic inspiration. Also, the efficiency and high productivity demanded in large scale standardised production changes life styles of the craftsmen to a point where the cultural bloodlines which generated the inspiration dry up.

However, isolating the craftsman from the market might have an equally unnatural effect since conditions of 'hot house growth' rarely stimulate an artistic tradition. Should these skills and their expression remain moribund and preserved in their original setting? 'Preservation' connotes changelessness, and where the whole environment is changing it may be artificial, and perhaps cruel to attempt seclusion of art. Ideologies including Marxism, theories including those of Verrier Elwin have played upon the place of tradition in the dynamics of change. These predicaments illustrate the complexities of the issue of handicrafts development.

Exclusivity, on the other hand, pre-empt's the use of crafts in generating employment on any significant scale. A few of the most skilled craftsmen and their families alone are benefited by the demand for the crafts, while the rest of the population in which the skill is under-developed or latest cannot aspire to a share of the market.

Aesthetically, handicrafts prove stubborn to market-induced changes of content, form and design. Crafts are generally classified into two categories -- those which are decorative and those which combine decorative appeal with utility. Some products such as 'fine art' items are high quality, hard-sell products with an exclusive clientele. Orienting craft produced from a purely decorative value to utility-cum-decorative value is a ploy sometimes used by promoters of crafts to widen the market for the goods. Yet this might prove infructuous. The question of what constitutes utility is open to varied interpretations. Neither philosophers nor economists have been able to define this term, and justifiably so. A mural on the wall of her house may be as essential to a folk painter, as tables or chairs to an urban Indian. To be surrounded by beautiful objects, to participate in the creative arts may offer more fulfilment than higher income levels to artisans. All these factors would come into play simultaneously in defining the limits of commercialisation of a craft. Since there are no linear relationships here (the compactness of input-output analysis precludes its use in the development of handicrafts) the issue of craft production and marketing becomes more confused.

There are many categories of handicrafts. Some that do not usually figure in the list of 'crafts' are goods made by hand, but not necessarily 'artistic' e.g. bookshelves and holders made of tar drums or broken wood, quilts stitched from rags, buckets made from scrap metal etc.¹ These are consumer items made from recycled waste, used mainly by the poorest income groups. They have been by-passed by handicrafts developmental programmes

Development assistance to handicrafts does not permit of a standard prescription. Several issues are intertwined -- government support of the 'usual type' can rob craft of its spontaneity and stifle art, but on the other hand a complete absence of government initiative might confine the craft to its local setting, and not lead to the generation of income. At the same time, unless craftsmen are introduced to management, accounting and marketing techniques consciously, they are not likely to acquire them naturally by emulation. But if they are deflected to such instruction, their art might suffer. If only a few artisans are hand-picked for the training in management, the others will be exposed to the eventuality of the emergence of a new vanguard elite who might replace the money-lenders in their exercise of oppressive pressure.

Female artisans work in a special framework and the issue of generating employment for them through handicrafts has distinctive features. Firstly, there is the question of the propriety

1 For instance, a large number of the manufacturing trade groups associated with the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) of Ahmedabad produce hand-crafted utility goods.

of providing employment to women through handicrafts. Female artisans are generally unpaid family workers whose economic contribution is under-rated, whether as artisan or farm helper. Regardless of their skills, female artisans in traditional societies may be kept at a distance from 'outside' marketing agencies, so that they are denied the opportunity of modifying/innovating on the basis of market feed-back. In most cases the earnings generated by them are appropriated by the male heads of household, and they do not enjoy the power to allocate them between different uses according to their own priorities. The traditional intra-household power structure operates to 'fix' them in their roles as artisan-cum-household worker. Should women continue to be given employment in handicrafts when there is evidence to suggest that it succeeds in strengthening the stereotype of the exploited unremunerated woman worker, that such employment as it exists now does not correspond to an increase in their welfare?

Ex-poste analysis of the Mithila paintings, ^{project} shows that the process of commercialisation of the art form has provided illustrations of many of the questions mentioned above and appears to be a laboratory case of the complexities of the issues surrounding handicrafts development. For example:

- Commercialisation of the traditional skill of painting has brought economic gain to almost 400 rural households in selected villages in district Madhubani in the last decade. But

income has been unsteady, and only a few of the top grade artists have sustained their earnings at a high level;

- Commercial success of Mithila paintings was derived from sophisticated marketing technique employed by developing agencies, notably HHEC. Yet a slackening in marketing strategy by HHEC caused the demand to decline dramatically. Endorsement is also found for the view that the commercial success of a community of craftsmen is usually dependent on intensive involvement by an outside agency. The withdrawal of such support proves to be a major setback for the commercial prospects of the craft. The problem of making a craft self-generating therefore remains insoluble on the basis of the Mithila experience;
- Limits to commercialisation have been imposed by the saturation of market demand for the existing genre of Mithila paintings on the one hand, and the absence of imaginative innovation in product design on the other. But at the same time innovation seems to be difficult to introduce on account of the obscure relationship between utility and decorative value;
- Income enhancement of artists has not been synonymous with their integration with the development process. Commercialisation of Mithila paintings by itself has not resulted in the reinforcement of the infra-structural framework which equips individuals for participating in development programmes. Literacy, health, knowledge and assertion of political power, class and caste distinctions,

all these have remained unimpacted in the last 10 years of the commercialisation of the painting skill. For women artists in particular, artistic success has not brought commensurate economic benefit as often access to their own income is denied to them.

Balanced against these findings the Mithila experience has also demonstrated the relevance and potential of crafts as a source of employment for women. Home based production, use of hereditary skills and local raw materials, relatively low investment base are all positive features of craft-based employment. What mechanisms can be introduced in the handicrafts sector such that the interests of women artisans are ~~protected~~^{protected}, and their position strengthened without splintering the basic character of cottage production?

New Inputs - Some Recommendations

Specific areas of action in relation to the future development of Mithila paintings have suggested themselves in the course of the present investigation, both in terms of the craft of folk painting and women artists' needs. Certain general recommendations for craft-related inputs and requirements of craftswomen have been abstracted from the Mithila case.

(i) Craft-related needs

Commercial production of Mithila paintings has suffered from a lack of quality control, slow diversification and lack of

quality control, ~~also diversification and lack of~~ ^{organisation.} ~~organisation.~~

The last, the absence of a viable production organisation appears to be the kind of identification that inspired the idea of MCAM.

Diversification and imaginative innovation is likely to be the spark that fires the Mithila paintings venture alive again. Intensive involvement of technical institutions and experts is vital to ensure that evolution of the art makes no compromises with ethnic/religious traditions and yet at the same time attracts demand. Regular and extended visits to the villages would be required by experts, both representatives of official organisation as well as private individuals who might be appointed on an ad-hoc consultancy basis.

Quality control in an art product presupposes uniformity and discipline, both of which are difficult to enforce on the artistic temperament. And yet a measure of quality control is necessary to protect both consumers and more so, the artists who are threatened with demand slumps. A seemingly romantic solution to this problem has been suggested by some artist-officers who have worked in the Mithila villages, and is parallel to the proposed programme of rural development conceived by scholar activists described earlier. They suggest that since art is a function of the quality of life, an improvement in art can be achieved through providing basic physical requirements of the artists. Emancipation from hunger, relief from time-intensive

survival chores (such as fetching drinking water, collection of firewood), assurance of subsistence wage from another source than painting -- all these inputs would create the environment in which art thrives.

MCAM, with support from scholars and knowledgeable persons of official agencies, is oriented towards providing some of these needs in a small way. Some practical and low-cost facilities have been proposed by nutritionists and experts in rural technology. For instance, it has been suggested that solar-heated water could be made available at the village by installing a simple water reservoir in a central location, and appointing a water carrier with a bullock cart to replenish it. This seemingly trivial provision would reduce the hours of cooking substantially and also impact health through reduction in water-borne diseases. The Madhubani centre of AIHB (MSEC) could play an effective role in channelling services of this nature to the villages.

With regard to marketing, there seems to be a strong case for the return of HHEC to the export of paintings. Its abrupt and somewhat insensitive withdrawal has all but punctured the Mithila paintings 'project'. Support by HHEC would be critical to establishing MCAM ^{as a quality supplier of paintings.} in foreign markets. A revival strategy could be worked out by HHEC experts, re-focussing on the high artistic merit of the Mithila paintings and winning acceptance for the product in important art markets abroad.

Attempts to create a market at home for Mithila paintings have been unimaginative and therefore unsuccessful. Domestic demand is limited in terms of magnitude and confined spatially to cities. Mithila paintings vie for the limited market with other paintings executed by hand, such as Kalamkari, Nathdwara etc. It is here that product innovation might give an edge to Mithila paintings provided the new range preserves the appeal of the 'original Mithilas'. The present marketing outlets have proved to be inappropriate. Exports of the Bihar government (i.e. retail outlets of BSIEMDC and BSSIC) frequently display old and faded ^{stocks} ~~stocks~~, and sell paintings of poor quality. It is reported, for instance, that there have been occasions when buyers for exports have purchased folk paintings from agents who peddle spurious Madhubani paintings. Such practices have had a detrimental effect on the public assessment of the paintings.

Another facet of domestic demand is the 'sale' of painting skill in the form of on-site commissions to renowned artists for decorating important public buildings. But there are obvious limits to such commissions, since over-exposure will inflict long-term damage on the novelty of Mithila paintings.

Fresh demand has been generated unexpectedly by the Central Government in 1978. Mithila artists have been commissioned to produce 10,000 paintings for 1979 calendars to be used by various official departments. A total sum of Rs 3 lakhs is

being spent on this project¹. On the average about 1000 artists are likely to supply the paintings, each doing about 10 paintings. This is likely to fetch each artists total earnings of Rs 300 in the current season. It might be attempted to turn this into an annual purchase programme. Similarly the scope for regular commissions might be probed with other government departments, as for instance in the production of 'cultural' posture for the Tourism Department.

Generalising from the Mithila model, a possible leavened model of crafts development is suggested here which emphasises the employment potential of handicrafts while taking account of the inherent limitation of their market potential. In this model the starting point would be the identification of an area rather than a craft where the handicrafts employment project is to be established. Leading crafts of the area would be developed and 'prepared' for the market. A service-cum-development centre would provide facilities to each of these crafts, from production to marketing. The sales proceeds from marketing the craft items would accrue to a Crafts Fund at the Centre. All artisans would be paid a remuneration in relation to their time input in the craft, irrespective of the actual sales made in the market. Thus the profits from a successful craft item, such as Mithila paintings, would also go towards maintaining artisans who are engaged in less profitable crafts. While a floor wage is assured to the producers of the 'slow'

1 The calender project is being handled by NAIK, an artists' workshop in Mehrauli village near New Delhi, for the All India Handicrafts Board.

items, the management would ensure that the product-mix reflects dynamic consumer demand. The implication is that while craftspeople are being oriented to the production of high-demand items, they do not face destitution but are assured a survival wage.

But important reservations would arise in respect of this model when the operations of private trade are considered. For example, artisans who make the high-demand products might refuse to supply through the centre which burdens them with the handicap of carrying less successful artists with them, and might well prefer to supply through private traders who assure them higher remuneration. Yet despite this strong motivational pull, the model might still succeed if it assures a steady market, a guaranteed floor wage, incentives for excellence in craftsmanship, creation of infra-structural facilities for the well-being of the community, introduction of artistic stimuli such as interaction with other craftspeople, exhibitions, construction of craft museums etc.

(ii) Women's needs:

Ordinarily there would be no rationale for identifying women's needs separately, after the areas of direct and indirect assistance to them as artists have been identified. But in the social milieu of Mithila, and perhaps in other traditional communities of the country, protection of the artists, ^{or craft persons} does not imply a corresponding well-being of the women.

Foremost, there exists a need to establish women's access to the income they earn and the ability to exercise full control over it. They should be able to allocate it between different uses according to priorities which they assign. This is an area in which mobilisation of opinion is likely to be the only effective instrument of change, since there are obvious limits to manipulation of intra-household behaviour by policy.

A women's organisation, such as MCAM would have the potential for creating the environment in which women's control of their own income is considered natural. This ~~will~~^{would} involve a prior 'attack' on the merit of the system which evaluates a woman by the extent of her show of dependence on the male head of the households. Surveying¹ the stratified village society in Mithila there was unexpected evidence of the existence of strong views in the poor-to-middle class groups against the premium set on total submission of women to men. MCAM could build on this, more in the spirit of obtaining a measure of financial independence for women artists, rather than as a feminist cause celebre⁶ of sexual equality. Caution would necessarily have to be exercised since the deep-rooted patriarchal society is likely to be hostile to a move for total equality.

1 Ref. ISS field survey.

Another 'women's area' which requires intervention urgently is the question of providing income to the women artists who have not been commercially successful. As stated earlier, their feeling of rejection has bred bitterness and a loss of self-confidence. Rehabilitating these artists in a manner that they too earn a steady income, whether through painting or other form of self-employment or wage work, might be considered a primary goal of development agencies in the area. The proposals of the team of scholar-activists for creating employment in agriculture and non-agricultural occupations might be considered as one of the solutions. Organisers would have to ensure that these forms of employment too are associated with dignity and respect, in the same manner as Mithila folk paintings, so that the disappointment at not having made the grade as an artist does not taint their lives.

Induction of a female staff member at the AIHB Centre in Madhubani (MSEC) is likely to support the rehabilitation programme for the painting drop-outs. A woman staffer would be suited to the task of obtaining data from women regarding their skills, mobility, time availability, wage expectation etc. which would be necessary in formulating an employment schedule. Orientation training or upgrading of skills are also likely to be absorbed more fully with a female staff who could act variously as instructor, intermediary between the women and the male instructors, supervisor etc.

The requirements of destitute women — widows, abandoned wives, divorcees — would have to engage the attention of developing agencies as a special sub-set of the female labour force in the village. These women are sole supporters of their households, and some of them derive a large proportion of their annual income from painting. Fluctuations in earnings from paintings toss their households to the brink of starvation. A vicious circle of poverty is triggered off when gnawing hunger clouds artistic inspiration and prevents them from buying paper and paint. An intensive programme seems to be required to stabilise their earnings, and this could perhaps constitute a priority element of the general employment programme discussed above.

Women artists of Scheduled Caste households combine agricultural labour with painting. They generally paint in the afternoon, after returning from the fields. They may be absent from the village when buyers or officials visit, and therefore tend to miss the opportunity to display their work and to receive comments or market feed-back. An attempt might be made by official agencies to reach these artists specially in the evenings, as also to encourage visitors to make their buying trips in the afternoon. Alternatively, finished paintings of Scheduled Caste artists could be stocked with the MSEC in Madhubani and shown to the visitors on behalf of the artists.

In sum, women's vulnerability as artists and as women in the patriarchal society needs to be overcome. Long-term measures to stabilise income and status are required so that their gift

for painting emerges as a tool for lessening ~~gates~~ sexual inequality. In order to establish the access of craftswomen to inputs of long-term change, such as adult literacy, small savings, knowledge of social and political structures, there appears to be no substitute to a strong sisterhood. Such a fraternity, whether formalised in an institution or an informal association, is likely to serve as the most effective pipe-line for delivering benefits equitably between the ^{women} artisans and the community. Such an organisation would teach women the technique of resolving conflicts, the confidence to try new things, to learn to save, and to become self-actualising and self-governing.

Profiles

Bhaskar Kulkarni

Field Officer of HHEC in Madhubani

Bhaskar Kulkarni is a self-confessed drop-out from society. Part mystic, part artist, Bhaskar has devoted himself fully to interests which might appear nebulous to the conventional observer. He pursues with love and zeal concepts such as the source of light, the content of energy, the metaphysical nature of man-woman conflict. His day might include a religious conversation with the sun or a tender exchange with a patch of earth.

His capacity to lavish love is Bhaskar's most outstanding personal quality. At 48, he is a total romantic for whom relationships are delineated simply in terms of love or hate. He carried this pristine quality to Madhubani in 1966.

Born into a Maharashtrian Brahmin family in Satara district, Bhaskar grew up in Bombay. His businessman father and visionary mother encouraged their sons and daughters to develop individual interests. When Bhaskar emerged a peripatetic vagabond, his parents did not attempt to check his waywardness. While other sons attended school, Bhaskar took to travelling in the rural neighbourhood of Bombay. "But I got upset when ticket clerks asked me where I wanted to go. How did I know?" So he acquired a bicycle to pursue his uncharted travels which started taking him away from home for several months. The impressions and visions

of those days served to nudge the latent artist in him. He embarked on a programme of informal education in fine art, including a spell at the JJ School of Art in Bombay.

Sustaining himself on earnings from short assignments as a commercial artist, Bhaskar continued to travel. He alternated between a 'straight' life with advertising agencies (he also worked for Air India), and an uninhibited bohemian life. "An abundance of beautiful ideas, friends and liquor. This is what I lived for then, and still do."

He went to HHEC originally on deputation from the National Textile Corporation where he worked as an art designer in the Weavers Service Centre. Mrs Pupul Jayakar, the then Chairman of HHEC and adviser to the Textile Corporation hand-picked Bhaskar to spear-head the HHEC programme of handicraft promotion in drought-afflicted north Bihar. In appointing Bhaskar to the Madhubani area, the HHEC seems to have acted counter to the rigid recruitment policy of government agencies. Lacking in brilliant professional art degrees, Bhaskar also adopted a take-it-or-leave-it stance about his taste for liquor. Yet the appointment was an unqualified success, as manifested by the 'Madhubani painting boom' of the '60's and '70's.

Behind the unscheduled commercial success of the folk-painting project in Madhubani, lies a poignant human drama of despair and faith. Drought conditions had caused men to leave

the villages in search of employment in cities, forsaking their young families. The women watched helplessly as the children and elders of the village went without food. Everybody waited, just waited for either the rains or the postman. "At this time the colours dried up inside the women. They were without their men - you understand". Sensing that their emotional frustration compounded their poverty, Bhaskar reached out to them with love. He lodged in a small bonet in Madhubani and visited Jitwarpur every day.

He distributed paper and colours to each artist, and collected all paintings executed in the previous week. Using a personal formula of affection, encouragement, innuendo and instruction, Bhaskar revived their "inner palettes". "I unlocked the rainbows in their hearts and colours flowed freely. I told them that I cared for them and they felt human again. The rapport was so perfect that they would dream of me a day before I visited them. Even the children would dream of me."

Bhaskar also became a one-man succour institution who occasionally met medical bills and school fees of families in acute distress. This was done sincerely and without a sense of patronage, and he is remembered fondly in the village for this limited program.

For nine months Bhaskar visited Jitwarpur and adjacent village Banti, enthusing the women to paint. His keen eye

assessed the artistic merit of each painting, and although he 'purchased' the entire lot from the women, he sifted them carefully in the seclusion of this hotel room. "Paintings which were pure and based on the artistic tradition of Mithila were most valuable. Others were synthetic, drawn with the hands and not the heart." Every month or so Bhaskar would sling a bundle of paintings over his shoulder and take them to HREC offices in Delhi or Patna. The genuine paintings were exported, while the others were destroyed. Although this system was based on deception of the artists, Bhaskar emphasises that it was the most effective ploy for stimulating folk art under conditions of a relief programme.

After the intensive period of the drought relief project, HREC phased out of North Bihar. Bhaskar was withdrawn. Other HREC projects in folk and tribal art were assigned to him. He divided his time between the Santhals of Bihar-west Bengal, World tribals of Maharashtra, and the Bastar tribals of Madhya Pradesh. At each place he attempted to comprehend local art traditions by relating them to life-styles of the tribes. His experiences sensitised him to rural folk-art, but his insights were used intermittently by HREC.

His approach to the issue of 'development' of local folk crafts reflects his respect for creativity. He believes that art burgeons naturally and wilts in conditions of 'hot-house'

growth. What the artists need is a freedom from physical want, and not the allure and pressure of a commercially promising market.

After resigning from BHEC earlier this year, Bhaskar has taken up permanent residence in Ganjad, a small village of World tribals in Maharashtra. Here he has initiated the first phase of his project to enhance the physical well-being of the artists, and has begun work on providing water for field irrigation in the village. Characteristically, he shunned scientific indigenous techniques of water divining, and urged a small farmer to 'feel' his land for water. However water was not struck at the identified spot. Undeterred, Bhaskar had initiated digging at another 'felt' site.

It is not clear where the novel experiment will take Bhaskar or the villagers. But here is a man who has tenaciously viewed life through the preferred filter of romance, and rejected the society which rejected his vision.

Jamuna Devi is a celebrated artist in the Harijan 'tole' of Jitwarpar, whose mud frescoes and paintings were displayed in Japan during Expo '70. Her themes are powerful, and executed with a certain economy of line and stroke. With a sparing use of colour, she etches vivid symbols of strength and power. A lion sketched in black generates a sense of menace with its long red tongue; while a serpent speeding through paddy fields is a poetic metaphor based in actuality. Jamuna Devi paints on paper and burlap coated with cow-dung. The cow-dung coat is an innovation introduced by this artist, and despite attempts by others to use this technique, it remains unique to her.

The success of the last 10 years has wrought fundamental changes in the life-style and hopes of Jamuna Devi and her family. As the girl bride of Ramji, a landless agricultural labourer, Jamuna Devi was discredited by her in-laws for lacking the common skill of paddy transplanting. In her natal village in Bbhika block 40 kms. away, transplanting was traditionally conducted by males. Young girls are introduced to the job when their spine is supple enough to adjust to the long hours of onerous stooping. For Jamuna Devi, it was too late, and she could only obtain lesser-paid agricultural work such as bunding, watering the fields etc. She also performed odd jobs for prosperous households in the village -- sweeping, scavenging -- and eked a pittance. Competition for odd-jobs was keen, especially in the lean agricultural season.

Sustaining her status on the earnings of marginal occupations, Jamuna Devi sensed a deep frustration. Her young family of two sons and two daughters were deprived the privilege of a regular meal each day because of their mother's inability to contribute to their father's income. The eldest daughter was married to 'shameful' circumstances. Nanji raised a small loan from cultivators by pledging his services until the amount was repaid. Two cast-off sarees and light silver anklets were the girl's trousseau, and a meagre wedding feast with only two preparations was provided.

All that has changed now. Jamuna Devi is frequently commissioned for on-site mural painting at exhibitions and locations in New Delhi, Patna and Varanasi. Nanji who colours her paintings, always accompanies her. Their combined earnings on these commissions average Rs. 80 per day. Jamuna Devi has stopped agricultural work, and now concentrates exclusively on paintings. Nanji however paints only in his spare time because despite his wife's celebrity, the income from paintings is irregular.

Their elder son, Basudev Mochi, is a palm-tree tapper. He earns a regular wage of Rs. 4 per day for six months in the year, and works as an agricultural labourer for the rest of the year. His wife and children live in a separate establishment in Jitwarpur. The younger daughter, whose wedding 2 years ago was an extravaganza of feasting and exchange of gifts, lives in her married home, like

her elder sister. Kishori Mochi, the teen-aged youngest son, is a student of class 7 in the Jitwarpur High School. He is the only literate in the family, and is slated for a life 'free of toil in the fields'.

Painting has brought status to Jamuna Devi in her community. Theirs is the leading Harijan family in the village. Ramji treats her with transparent affection born of companionship. He insists, and she agrees, that her ability to earn is not material to their regard for each other.

Yet this leading Harijan family of folk painters is strangely vulnerable. At a recent exhibition in New Delhi, Jamuna Devi's paintings fetched a price of Rs. 100 per mount. A month later, back in the village, she was again selling her paintings for Rs. 5 per piece to the local middleman. "Whatever God gives" is the explanation offered for the disparity by the guileless couple. Less than four years ago, Jamuna Devi pawned household brass utensils to raise Rs. 11 to enrol as a member of a village cooperative of artists, which has been a virtual non-starter. She dismisses this experience as another instance of the 'ordained' exploitation of their resourceless community by the other castes.

An incipient cataract seems to be diminishing Jamuna Devi's vision. She has not thought of visiting an eye specialist. "Who will take me? It's not like before. Once I had injured my foot

with a hoe and the leg swelled like a balloon. Bhaskar Babu himself took me to Kailash 'dagar' (Doctor) and spent the money". Bhaskar Kulkarni, the sensitive artist/officer of the All India Handicrafts Board who piloted the relief programs in the '60's, is remembered with affection and gratitude. "He was one of us. He cared, he loved us".

In contrast to the sense of camaraderie with Bhaskar, Jamuna Devi regards all other officials and high caste individuals as 'maa-baap' or all-purpose providers. Mistakenly investing this interviewer with authority, she hesitantly recommended her case for a National Award. She is not sure if she deserves an award, but says she needs it. Not for status, but for cash and the fine shawl that goes with it.

Bana Devi

Artist

Bana Devi, mother of four children, is an artist in Jitwarpur whose paintings are currently acknowledged as among the finest representation of Mithila art. Vibrant colours, bold contours and the novel themes of her paintings produce an electrifying effect. As she displays her work in the mud-coated courtyard of hut, the visitor is engulfed in a sense of drama. Several village artists stand on tip-toe at the boundary wall to glimpse her paintings for inspiration, while her husband or other male relatives monitor the visitor's reactions for later use in settling prices. All the while Bana Devi is silent, alert for a spontaneous word of praise or criticism, and also for the visitor's inclination to buy. She appears reluctant to talk, and seems to prefer to deal through her husband.

Yet her withdrawal is a sophisticated subterfuge for maintaining harmony in the family, particularly with her husband. She instinctively wears the cowl of the detached-hermit-cum-foolish-woman so that her success does not become a threat to males and older women of the household. Her perception of the delicate balance of human relations in a family is a measure of sensitivity.

Bana Devi belongs to a family of Mahapatra Brahmins. In the drought of 1966-67 this family was amongst the worst sufferers.

Income from shraddh ceremonies for the dead dried up completely and they lost the little land they still possessed when her father-in-law made distress sales to raise money for consumption. Bana Devi and other women could not contribute to the family income since tradition forbids Mahaptra women from wage employment, even from helping on the family farm. For Bana (which is the vernacular for 'boy', an affectionate pet-name by which she was known in her parents' home) the horror was compounded when her year-old daughter went hungry.

When HHEC launched its drought relief project, Bana Devi displayed a rare determination to avail of the opportunity to earn. Her school education (upto class 4), and the half-knowledge of Sanskrit transmitted to her by her priest father made her paintings different to the work of most others. She was diligent and persevering and had an innate sense of form which she had inherited from her father's mother, an accomplished painter of her village.

Bhaskar Kulkarni, HHEC field officer, recognised Bana Devi's potential, and via her husband, instructed her in the finer details of painting. Although she and Bhaskar did not communicate directly, a complete rapport developed between them. In time the family allowed Bhaskar to meet her freely and her art thrived under direction from him, as also from well-wishers like Mr. U. Maharathi, officer of the Bihar State Small Scale Industries Department.

With an average income of Rs. 100 per month from the sale of paintings, Bana Devi became the primary bread-winner of the family. Sensing the premium value commanded by her paintings, she increased her output by asking her husband to help her with the colouring. The latter, who was engaged for only short spells during the year on "Jajmani" (service of clients) or in cultivating the small patch of leased-in land, took up the job with enthusiasm. A painting which earlier took Bana Devi 5-6 days to complete, was now completed in 2 days by their joint effort. But she remained the leader of this team, the artist who carried the germ of Mithila art in her psyche.

With an increase in the popularity of her paintings, Bana Devi found it necessary to delegate household work to others so that she was allowed the maximum time to paint. She hired a maidservant to assist in household chores -- sweeping, washing, fetching water and fuel. The maid, who still works for her is paid 50 paise per month in cash and some foodgrains, and occasionally she is given old clothes. The family had no tradition of hired domestic help and the appointment of the maid was a characteristically bold step by Bana Devi. Help with house work has enabled her to spend 5-7 hours each day in painting.

The theme for a painting evolves in the night hours, often unfolding dramatically in a dream. The next morning, when she

is cooking or feeding the children, Bama Devi finally selects one of the many pictures that she sees in her mind, and prepares a sketch in the afternoon. Seated on a mat on the floor with the white hand-made paper stretched before her, she is not tentative or hesitant, but definitive and self-confident. The stooped figure concentrates as if in prayer.

Bama Devi has earned about Rs. since 1967, the year she started painting for sale. The income from paintings is managed by both wife and husband. They have invested it -- largely in land and in the construction of a new house. The loss of land through indiscriminate sale by the father-in-law has been more than made up. The new large hut is provided with mud grain storage drums, which are brimming with unhusked paddy and pulses. Bama Devi is house-proud and the dwelling is meticulously clean. Rolls of paintings wrapped in plastic sheeting hang like exotic lamp-shades from the ceiling, and festoons of auspicious mango-leaves border doorways in graceful arcs.

Her enhanced authority in the home is strangely truncated in certain areas. Last year, Bama Devi's eldest daughter, aged 10 years, was married against the mother's wishes and without any family consultations with her. There was no means of resisting, so Bama Devi accepted the marriage as fait accompli, and consoled herself that she could buy happiness

for her daughter through the earnings from painting. They spent more than Rs. 2,000 on the wedding feast. When the daughter leaves her natal home a few years from now, the parents expect to spend Rs. 4,000 on gifts to the groom -- consumer durables such as cycle, watch, transistor radio.

Basa Devi has been invited to exhibitions all over India, and also commissioned for on-site assignments. She has so far only accepted invitations to travel if they included a ticket for her husband. They have attended exhibition-demonstrations in Bangalore, New Delhi, Patna, Varanasi etc. But earlier in March this year Basa Devi was enthusiastic about a trip to Chicago in a small party of artists without her husband.

The celebrity status of his wife has affected her husband Jaganath in many ways. Accustomed to total obedience from his wife whom he married as child-bride, he also had the additional lever of dominance on account of the fact that Basa bore four daughters in a row. Her meteoric rise to fame and money unnerved Jaganath in the beginning, but he enjoyed it when he started sharing the bounty. However, the local community regards him as somewhat of a parasite. A rebound reaction might have affected the marriage adversely, but Basa Devi's sophistry and understanding averted an unhappy turn in marital relations.

Sublimation of personal ambition and the traditional finality of marriage appear to be the corner-stones of Basa Devi's

approach to family life. Yet there is a hint of compromise, a suggestion that the artist exists in an uninhibited private world, while the woman inhabits the conventional world.

Mithila folk-art is evolving rapidly, and Baga Devi is prominent among the 'evolvers'. She has the capacity to propel the art in a new direction, and also has the capacity to organise the women into a fraternity of artists -- a woman to watch.

H.P. Mishra,
Assistant Director,
AIHB Marketing & Service Extension Centre,
Madhubani

The top resident civil servant directly in-charge of craft development in the Mithila area is the Assistant Director of the AIHB Marketing & Service Extension Centre (MSEC) in Madhubani. Since the establishment of MSEC in 1972, the post has been held by H.P. Mishra.

Mishra is a career bureaucrat of the Orissa State Government cadre. His assignment with the State Department of Industries, where he served as Extension Officer, was related to the development of rural crafts and industries. Later he joined the All India Handicrafts Board as Junior Field Officer of the AIHB in the Eastern Region. Here too his job was to identify industries and crafts which could be turned into viable sources of employment for craftsmen. Thus Mishra joined the MSEC with over 10 years of field experience in rural crafts. During this time he had scoured the areas assigned to him to locate latent skills which could be converted into marketable commodities.

At MSEC Mishra has used his skill of nurturing and promoting rural crafts with impressive results. During his tenure as the Assistant Director, there have been numerous revivals of folk crafts and art traditions, both for protecting the folk tradition as well as providing sustenance to its creators. Five major crafts of Mithila have been serviced intensively by the MSEC in the last five years in respect of both production and marketing. Besides Mithila folk paintings, the crafts include sikki work, lacquer work, embroidery (kasida), and doll-making.

A stout common sense and an astute instinct for the practical are sensors with which Mishra picks up signals of commerce-cum-art from poverty-stricken Mithila villages. In contrast to other official and semi-official promoters who have worked with Mithila crafts in the recent past, he has cultivated a distance from the overwhelming romance of the cultural traditions of the area. His somewhat 'blunted' artistic vision has proved an asset in that it has given him a commercial/practical perspective. He has evolved a special formula to divine the marketability of a craft, blending instinct and common sense with a respect for official stipulations of least cost, maximum coverage of artists etc.

The rural craftspeople served by the MSEC hold him in high regard. As he walks through the village, mild-mannered and placid, male craftsmen cluster around him for news of fresh orders, out-of-town assignments, demonstration trips etc. Women stand on the periphery of the group, occasionally aiming an anxious enquiry at 'Mishra Babu'. Cups of tea are offered to him, a rare luxury in a land where food shortages are endemic. The offering is made only partially out of deference for the position he holds; for the most part, it is a measure of the affection in which he is held.

Imperturbability and a genuine modesty are distinguishing features of Mishra's personality. In a society where the male ego is omniscient and underlies all relationships, absence of machismo is a startling discovery, more so in the head of the local official organisation. Whereas on the one hand he recognises and abides by

official hierarchies, at the same time he shows a capacity for accommodation, a willingness to give latitude. These qualities make him the ideal link between the practitioners of rural craft and its whimsical buyers. Impressively, both groups feel comfortable with him.

For rural women in the Mithila area, Mishra's personal decency and his 'clean' image of a family man have contributed significantly in melting their traditional reserve with strangers. These attributes have also been important in winning him acceptance in the conservative rural milieu of North Bihar.

As Assistant Director, Mishra has to travel in the Mithila villages frequently and intensively. The Centre does not have its own vehicle, so that he uses local modes of transport - buses, bullock cart, boat, rickshaw. His frequent travel trips leave his young family alone in Madhubani town. His wife and four children are generally supportive about his job. But there are times in the year when their loneliness overrides their enthusiasm for their father's job, and they wish for a tinsel-starred city appointment for him.

Mishra expresses dissatisfaction with the achievements of the MSEC in harnessing the potential of Mithila crafts. He feels constrained by the financial limitations imposed on the MSEC, and voices his concern at the wasted opportunities for craft development incident to this limitation. "In this line it is important to produce a lot of samples for dispatch to potential buyers. The Centre does not have the resources to finance the production of samples, and the artists are too poor to do so from their own resources

MSEC ought also to prepare itself for marketing craft items directly, Mishra suggest. Its role of a servicing organisation might be extended without difficulty into direct marketing. Contacts established by Mishra and other staff members of MSEC in wholesale and retail trade, particularly within the country, offers a ready-made trade network which could be tapped for the benefit of the craftspeople.

The dedication and compassion that Mishra has brought to his job has chiselled a promising image of the Indian 'field' bureaucrat. His performance has demonstrated the success potential of combining authority with a basic regard for human values.

Appendix 1

ALL INDIA HANDICRAFTS BOARD - (AIHB) - (West Block VII, R.K. Puram
New Delhi)

The All India Handicrafts Board is an agency set up by the Government of India, Ministry of Industry to provide development, assistance and support to traditional handicraft industries throughout the country. The Board undertakes studies of the problems of crafts as well as craftsmen and women, and based on the problems observed formulates the programmes of development. The programmes supported by the Board include training, technology development, marketing assistance, export promotion, research, organisation of artisans etc.

The annual budget of the Board for the year 1977-78 was Rs 11 crores. The Board also assists the State governments in the formulation of their development plans for crafts.

The Board is essentially a technical and financial assistance agency. It does not trade. It however helps public sector and private sector firms engaged in handicrafts production, marketing and exports.

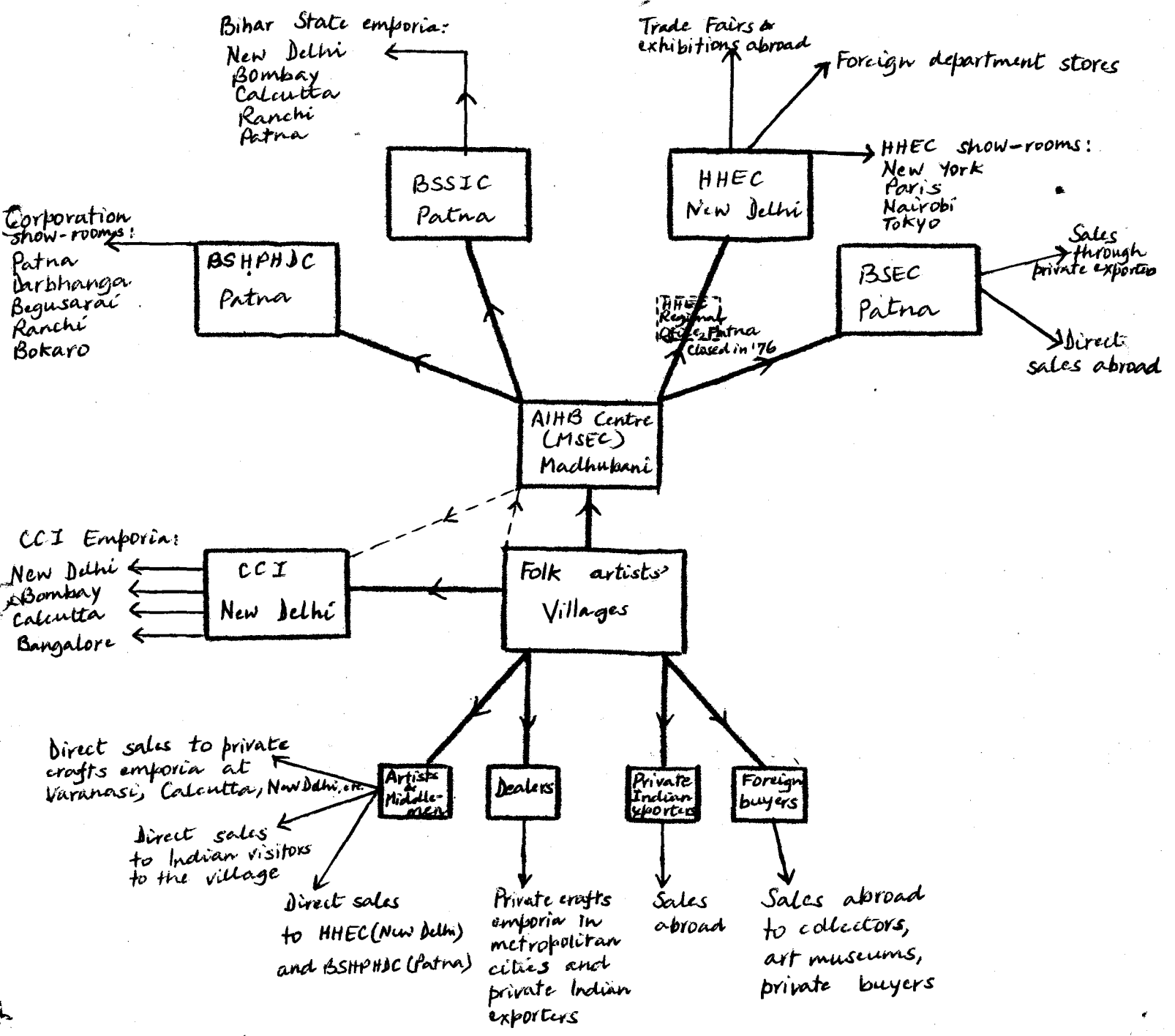
HANDICRAFTS & HANDLOOMS EXPORTS CORPORATION (HHEC)

(Lok Kalyan Bhavan, 11A Rouse Avenue,
New Delhi)

The Handicrafts and Handloom Exports Corporation, is primarily a trading organisation set up by the Central Government to undertake exports of traditional handicrafts & handlooms on a commercial scale. The Corporation was set up about 20 years ago and has established a network of retail and wholesale emporia and outlets in selected markets of the world, where it maintains sample show-rooms, stocks goods to be offered for sale and continuously carries on publicity and sales campaign. At present, the share capital of HHEC is approx. Rs 3 crores. Within India it has established a number of regional offices for procurement and stocking of goods of handicrafts and handloom products of exportable quality. It also provides design and other product development guidance to handicrafts and handloom producers. Each year it brings a number of foreign buyers and designers to visit India and assist in selection and development of exportable merchandise. In the year 1977-78 HHEC exported goods worth Rs 30 cro

It can be regarded as a trading instrument of the All India Handicrafts Board which is a primarily promotional and developing agency and does not undertake trading etc. The Board provides financial and other assistance to HHEC for its progress.

FLOW CHART OF MARKETING CHANNELS OF MITHILA PAINTINGS



- BSPHDC : Bihar State Handloom, Powerloom, and Handicraft Development Corporation, Patna
- BSSIC : Bihar State Small Industries Corporation, Patna
- BSEC : Bihar State Export Corporation, Patna
- CCI : Central Cottage Industries; emporia at New Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Banga
- HHEC : Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation, New Delhi

Summary description of the research work
conducted by scholars in the Mithila
villages in the period 1973-78 and their
forthcoming publications

Ga Mishra is founder member of the Master Craftsmen's Association of Mithila, and at present its Agent Secretary. An M.A. graduate in Maithili literature, Gauri Mishra is presently working on study on folk and rural art in India.

Gauri Mishra has also done a study in association with Subodh Jha for Dr Raymond Owens, anthropologist from the University of Texas.

His forthcoming publication in association with Dr Raymond Owens and Naomi Owens is on Mithila Weddings.

Dr. Erika Moser is lecturer in Visual Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, Heidelberg University. She has obtained her Ph.D in Anthropology, Sociology and Indian Art from the same University.

Dr Moser has conducted research in India and has held several sales exhibitions of Mithila Paintings in Germany for the Master Craftsmen's Fund. She also has plans to set up a museum, workshop, hostel etc. at Jitwarpur for the craftsmen and artists.

Presently Dr Moser is working towards the development of sikki craft amongst women in villages and is attempting to get aid from various German foundations for an elaborate handicrafts development programme.

Raymond Owens, an anthropologist from the University of Texas, in, USA, has conducted a detailed socio-economic study of village of Jitwarpur, Madhubani District, Bihar. The study been carried out in association with Subodh Jha (a sociologist a resident of Jitwarpur) and Gauri Mishra for an eight-village y designed by Scarlett Epstein of AFRAS, the University of ex.

He founded the Master Craftsman's Association of Mithila Mrs Mishra.

Based on his research, Dr Owens' first publication, 'Six Mithila Painters' is expected to be published shortly. Another upcoming book in collaboration with Gauri Mishra and his wife M Owens is on Mithila Weddings.

Subar Jha, a sociologist from Patna University, has carried an economic and demographic study of two villages in Madhubani district, Bihar- One in the interior and one near a large town.

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