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Madhu-Sravani: A cultural reflection of Maithil brahmins

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Abstract

Culture is an integral part of human life, shaping our identity, values, traditions and lifestyle. India is a melting pot of various religions, castes, languages, and cultures, providing us with a distinct and vibrant cultural legacy. Different religions in India have their own distinct culture, languages and traditions, showcasing our national unity and cultural diversity. This study is about a colorful and sound festival of Mithila region known as Madhu-Sravani which is celebrated by the newly bride and groom in the parent's place of the bride, this festival continues for fifteen days with some rules and traditions attached with it. This festival is seen not only to bring joy and excitement to the newlyweds in their married life but also to foster social cohesion and unity within the family and community. Newlyweds along with their family members and villagers connect beautifully with one another, the ritual of folk stories and folk songs by the elder women of the village adds fun element to this and make it more interesting.

Keywords: Cultural legacy; Traditions; Mithila; Madhu-Sravani; Bride; Groom; Social Cohesion

1. Introduction

Sawan is considered as one of the holiest weather in the Hindu religion; this month does not only hold the religious aspect but also it is regarded as the greenest and happiest month where there is greenery everywhere. This month brings love and warmth between the lovers and the newlyweds. Madhu-Sravani is one of the rituals performed by the women of Mithila in the month of Sawan it is also known as the festival of women of Mithila.

Mithila culture is so rich, wide and enthusiastic, it is having very traditional organic sound and can be easily seen in the rituals and even in the lifestyle daily. Madhu-Sravani is one of the unique and special traditions of fifteen days ritual (puja (It's a traditional Hindu method of practicing rituals to worship god and goddess.)) in which newlyweds' brides along with other family members, mostly women get participated. This tradition is said to have started in ancient times which carries so much significance to ease the married life of newlyweds, the word Madhu-Sravani describes the sweetness of the month sawan among the newlywed brides and grooms. This ritual is prevalently performed in Mithila region by the women of Maithil Brahmins. This beautiful festival is celebrated in the first coming month of sawan of the newlyweds just after the marriage where the girl dress up in her bridal clothes, wear jewelries and fast throughout the day, they along with their family members collect seasonal flowers like marigold, cheera-meera (It is a seasonal flower that blooms in the month of July and August and mostly found in Mithila region.), roses and tree leaves they keep them in bamboo basket to worship God Shiva, Goddess Parvati and the Serpents name Bisahari (believed to be Shiva's manas putri), whose idols are made up of raw soils during the puja ceremony which last for two weeks, a senior woman of the family or village known as Bidhvari narrates the folk stories related to God Shiva, Goddess Parvati and Nag-Nagin (serpents) this process eases the whole chaotic environment of a marriage process and turns it into fun moments which becomes so precious and memorable to all their life.

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2. Area Profile

The name Mithila is commonly used to refer to the Videha Kingdom, as well as to the modern-day territory that falls within the ancient boundaries of Videha. Mithila region is one of the prominent regions from ancient times. This place is used to be known by many names like Tirhut, Tirabhukti, and Mithilanchal. It is a geographical and cultural region of the Indian subcontinent bounded by the Mahananda river in the east, the Ganges in the South, the Gandaki river in the west and by the foothills of the Himalayas in the north. This region comprises of certain parts of Bihar and Jharkhand of India, it also adjoins districts of Koshi province, Bagmati Pradesh and it also includes some regions of Nepal known as Madhesh province. The native language of this place is known as Maithili, so the speakers of this place are known as Maithili, the language acts as an integral part of the region and makes very harmonious relations among the people of Mithila.

3. Demographic Profile

The Mithila region is a home to the Maithils, an Indo-Aryan ethno-linguistic group of people. According to the founder, president Dr. Dhankar Thakur of the International Maithil Council in the Mithila region, it consist of 24 districts of Bihar and 6 districts of Jharkhand, a total of 30 districts, have been included, which has a population of about 70 million and the area is 70 thousand square km, it also consist some areas from Nepal like Janakpur known as the Birthplace of Goddess Sita wife of Shri Ram according to the Hindu mythology (Mandal, 2023). These are some major districts of Bihar that come under the Mithila region names as Darbhanga, Madhubani, Mujjafarpur, Purnea, Sitamadhi, Supaul, Samastipur, Araria, and Kishanganj.



Figure 1 The map of Mithila region (sources: Google.Com)

4. Objective of the study

Culture is an inevitable part of human lives. It provides many vibrant colors and erases the monotony of life. Culture is something that can be easily seen and felt in an individual's lifestyle. Different cultures have different cultural reflections, and to know about them enriches the idea of humanity, knowing more about it makes us more of a human being.

The main objective of this study is to know that how beautifully this ceremony known as Madhu-Sravani strengthen the institution of marriage, it does not only make the bride and groom more comfortable with each other but also helps to forget the chaos and difference of opinion which usually happens between the family of the newlyweds and rejuvenates their relationship, in addition to it, we also want to know the detailing of this beautiful festival of newlyweds couples and shed a light on this ceremony of Mithila region which has been continuing for years and still remains relevant, moreover there is one more objective of this study that how this ceremony is enhancing the concept of social solidarity in today's time where we as a society are losing the integrity by not meeting each other in person, today we don't have time to sit with group and share the idea of life, as it is said by the famous thinker Aristotle that human is a social animal, so this study will shed a light on how festival like this connects us as a society again and provide us chance to forget the stress of our daily life.

5. Methodology

This is purely an empirical study which is based on observations and measurable phenomena; it has derived knowledge from the actual experience of the author in person rather than from theory or belief and the 1st author herself is a Maithil Brahmin and she had the opportunity to witness this ritual up close several times since childhood. She has seen her elder sister and brother celebrating this festival after the marriage and closely studied and witnessed it multiple times, thus her personal experiences are intertwined with the Madhu-Sravani ceremony, where she has attempted to understand the enthusiasm and joy people display during this ritual, by observing people's gestures, listening to their conversations and incorporating her personal understanding, which has further strengthened this research paper.

6. Ritual Description

Madhu-Sravani is the festival for the newlyweds couple where the rituals are majorly celebrated by the bride in the first coming Sawan after her marriage, this festival is associated with various small and large rituals, including and exciting one, where women of the family or village women gather to sing Maithili folk songs showering blessing upon the bride and groom, and sharing advice on making their married life joyful and loving. The songs also include mythological tales of Nag-Nagin (serpents, who are considered as the manas putri of the God Shiva) Shiv Parvati and others. This goes on for fifteen days in the month of Sawan when according to the village and family tradition the food that can be taken by the bride is quite restrictive, in some places Sindha-Namak which is a kind of salt that can be taken by the bride. whereas, at many places bride must live on saltless diet for 15 days during this festival (Rawat, 2009).

In addition to that at many places the bride cannot even comb their hair throughout the festival, on the first day of the festival the bride's hair are tied with threads, which are only untied on the final day of the puja, these things might get tougher for the bride. There is also the biggest ritual of the bride listening to the folk stories of Hindu mythology of Nag-Nagin, Shiv-Parvati by the older women of the village known as Bidhkari which adds so much fun element to this ritual and creates a sense of knowledge, ease and interests. One of the things that is also can be commonly seen with Madhu-Sravani is the act of collecting flowers, all the younger and elder siblings of the bride, her friends also including the brides, collect all the beautiful and seasonal flowers and makes enchanting garlands of those flowers which is being used at the time of worshipping here all the idols of the Gods like Shiv-Parvati, Nag-Nagin, elephants are made up of the soil (Jha J. K., 2016). This festival is celebrated in a place called Kohbar where the names of the bride and bridegroom are written with the beautiful other paintings which makes the whole place look aesthetic. There are many songs and hymns related to this whole ritual, presenting some lines of one of those folk songs here that depicts the ritual of collecting flowers:

“Sakhi phool lodhe gailon phulwariya

Sang me saheliya na

Koi beli phool lodhe

Koi chameli phool lodhe

Koi lodh laye champa ke kaliya.

Sang me saheliya na

Koi Ram var mange,

Koi Shyam var mange

Koi mang lelehan bhangiya bhikhariya

Sang me saheliya na” (Jha, 2004)

This folk song is the beautiful depiction of the act of flower collection, where bhangiya bhikhariya is referred to lord Shiva.



Figure 2 Bride celebrating the festival along with the Bidhkari

7. Role of Bride's Family

According to the ancient tradition of Mithila this festival of fifteen days is celebrated at the house or place of bride's family (Rani, 2023), the bride usually returns to her parent's place to celebrate this ceremony which is known as Naihar in Maithili language, not only the family but the entire village considers the new bride as their own daughter and makes collective effort to ensure the success of her worship. During these fifteen days, the villagers send offerings to the girl performing the Madhu-Shravani puja, showcasing their support and solidarity to her family, bride's family along with the villagers also organize village feast known as bhandara on the final day of the puja (Singh, 2023).

8. Role of Groom's Family

In this entire festival, the groom and his family also make a significant contribution. From the day the bride starts worshipping; her in-laws provide all necessary items, including new clothes, food, fruits, and more, known as Bharo (Pathak, 2024). The groom and his family also bear all expenses during the puja. On the final day, the groom's family sends gifts, clothes and presents to the bride's family, including for children and elders as a token of love and affection. This festival strengthens the bond of affection and goodwill between the two families.

9. Research Findings

India our county, is a vibrant tapestry of diverse communities, regions, and cultures, each culture teaches us a unique way of living, and through the festivals we celebrate, we glimpse the colors of our lives. This liberates us from despair and helps propagate our human values to many people. This study reveals how culture makes each aspect of human life unique and vibrant, adding richness to our experiences and makes us livelier.

10. Conclusion

The present study provides an in-depth exploration of Madhu-Sravani, a sacred festival in Mithila culture, based on empirical research and observations. It highlights the multifaceted aspects of Mithila culture and demonstrate how Madhu-Sravani brings joy and blessings to the life of married couples, fostering a romantic start to their life together and filling their lives with hope and blessings of elders. Also, this festival further strengthens the foundations of family institutions in Maithil society.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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