Salhesa Iconography in Mithila Paintings: A Brief History
-Neel Rekha

Abstract
The district of Madhubani has acquired international recognition for producing beautiful paper reproductions of floor and wall paintings made by the Brahmana and Kayastha women of the region, more popularly known as Mithila Paintings or Madhubani Paintings. However in the past few decades, this region has also attracted attention for producing stunning paintings of God Salhesa, worshipped primarily by the Dusadhs of the region. These developments have taken place in a short span of forty years starting from 1970 to 2010 chiefly due to the efforts of a few artists such as Jamuna Devi, Shanti Devi, Chano Devi, Urmila Devi and Rampari Devi. The present paper is an attempt to trace the history of evolution of Salhesa iconography in Mithila paintings.

Ever since Mithila paintings acquired international attention, many scholars have shown interest in the evolution of Salhesa iconography in this artistic tradition. But an elaborate study on the chronology of the evolution of this God in Mithila paintings has not been attempted. Based on scattered evidences of paintings preserved in books, catalogues and articles and on oral records of artists, this paper traces a rough chronology of the emergence of this God in the pictorial vocabulary of Mithila paintings. It has been assumed that Salhesa wall paintings were never made in Mithila. The paper apart from tracing the chronology, for the first time also attempts to highlight some of the earliest endeavours of regional scholars to record the wall paintings of Salhesa. This is a revised version of the paper prepared for Salhesa Mahotsava, Lahaan, Nepal, 2012.
Introduction
The present paper is an attempt to trace the history of evolution of Salhesa iconography in Mithila paintings. Salhesa - a God primarily worshipped by Dusadhs of Mithila- has a distinctive identity of his own in Mithila’s cultural tradition. Ever since Mithila paintings acquired international attention, many scholars have shown interest in the evolution of Salhesa iconography in this artistic tradition. But an elaborate study on the chronology of the evolution of this God in Mithila paintings has not been attempted. The evolution of this God in the pictorial vocabulary of artists from Madhubani is quite a recent phenomenon and dates back to not more than forty years. Based on scattered evidences of paintings preserved in books, catalogues and articles and on oral records of artists, this paper traces a rough chronology of the emergence of this God in the pictorial vocabulary of Mithila paintings. The paper not only looks at paintings which have been recently published in scholarly writings but also at the records of the earlier period in personal collections to construct a rough chronology of the emergence of this God in Mithila paintings. It has been assumed that Salhesa wall paintings were never made in Mithila. The paper apart from tracing the chronology, for the first time also attempts to highlight some of the earliest endeavours of regional scholars to record the wall paintings of Salhesa.

A large portion of the paper has been based on ethnographic field work in villages Jitwarpur, Ranti and Laheriaganj between 1999 and 2004. Since artists are not certain about the datings, the year of the publication of scholarly writings, exhibition catalogues, private collections, datings of the stay of scholars in Madhubani, corroborated by the collections of Ethnic Arts Foundation, USA have suggested some rough datings of the evolution of this God. Though paintings based on Salhesa has been a novel phenomenon in the history of Mithila art, Salhesa as a God has been quite popular throughout Mithila. Since this iconography in Mithila paintings was primarily made by erstwhile untouchable Chamar and Dusadh castes and evolved as an offshoot of commercialisation, it came to be known as Harijan Mithila, Harijan Madhubani or Dusadh paintings. Tracing a chronology of this God also brings us in touch with different names through which it has been addressed. Between 2005 – 2010, I have been in constant touch with scholars and activists to establish a link between contemporary Salhesa paintings and its regional oral histories. From 2011- 2012, I have personally interviewed the artists and analysed the developments through field visits to Madhubani, visits to craft melas, emporias and looking at websites which keep on updating information on Mithila art.

Brief Background
The district of Madhubani has acquired international recognition for producing beautiful paper reproductions of floor and wall paintings made by the Brahmmana and Kayastha women of the region, more popularly known as Mithila Paintings or Madhubani Paintings. However in the past few decades, this region has also attracted attention for producing stunning paintings of God Salhesa, worshipped primarily by the Dusadhs of the region. These developments have taken place in a short span of forty years starting from 1970 to 2010 chiefly due to the efforts of a few artists such as Jamuna Devi, Shanti
Devi, Chano Devi, Urmila Devi and Rampari Devi. Since they belonged to erstwhile untouchable Chamar and Dusadh castes, their art was known collectively as Harijan style of Mithila painting (Rekha 2003). Gradually they have been also known as Dusadh paintings or Dalit Mithila paintings (Jain 1996, Szanton 2007). Never having a historical tradition of making elaborate floor and wall paintings, these artists learnt the techniques and styles of Mithila painting tradition from upper caste artists to evolve their unique tradition of making paintings of Salhesa as a parallel to the upper caste Ramayana paintings. Like the upper caste paintings, this new tradition has also been a women dominated tradition. However in their endeavours, they have been actively supported by male family members such as Seewan Paswan, Roudi Paswan, Uttam Paswan and Rajkumar Paswan, some of whom have also emerged as artists.

Though there are numerous ways in which these paintings are made today, there are primarily two styles in which Salhesa paintings in Madhubani are made today. These are the Gobar and Godana styles evolved by Jamuna Devi and Chano Devi of village Jitwarpur, Madhubani. Crucial role in the evolution of Salhesa iconography has been the role of scholar activists such as Upendra Maharathi, Bhaskar Kulkarni, Raymond Lee Owens and Erika Smith. (Rekha 2004). Equally important role in the evolution of this iconography has been the urge on the part of artists to project a new cultural identity inspired by the growing impact of Dalit movement in India. Filled with a sense of cultural pride, artists have innovated in numerous ways drawing a lot from upper class iconography as well as from their own culture. (Rekha 2006). Thus, in a short span of forty years while upper caste paintings tended to get standardised, these styles went through different phases of transition taking different forms of nomenclature, themes and interpretation.

Encouragement to the artists have been flowing since then and artists have experimented in various forms and styles showing the variant versions of the popular God Salhesa. Collections of Salhesa paintings in Madhubani style have now spread to museums, universities and private collections throughout the world. In the past few years, Salhesa paintings have been made on a large scale basis, almost parallel to the way in which Ram-Sita themes have been produced in Jitwarpur. Beautiful wall murals and paintings have been created in Jitwarpur village speaking volumes about the sense of cultural pride artists attach with Salhesa (See Figure 1 and 2). Most of the artists have stopped explaining the contextual stories of Salhesa as they were used to doing in the earlier days of commercialisation of this art. Also there has been a renewed interest among scholars to look for Salhesa paintings in the private collections which might create a new history of its datings. These wall paintings have also generated interest among regional scholars to look for oral versions of the Salhesa stories. To understand the evolution, it is essential to have a background information of the commercialisation of Mithila paintings which ultimately inspired erstwhile untouchable castes to evolve their style. The next part takes a brief look at its history of commercialisation of Mithila art.
Commercialisation of Mithila Painting: a Brief History
Commercialised Mithila paintings became known as Madhubani paintings after Archer discovered these wall murals following the earthquake of 1934 and brought it to the notice of the outside through his article *Maithil painting* in *Marg* (Archer 1949). Under the guidance of Pupul Jayakar, a relief programme was started in Jitwarpur and Ranti villages of Madhubani and upper caste tradition of *kohabar* and floor paintings were brought on paper. The project turned to be successful and Mithila paintings acquired international fame. 

*Figure 1 – Salhesa Wall Painting, Sushila Devi, Jitwarpur*

*Figure 2 – Salhesa Wall Paintings, Godana Style, Chano devi, Jitwarpur*
While Jitwarpur village became known for *Bharni* (colour paintings) made by Mahapatra Brahmans, Ranti village became famous for *Kachni* (line paintings) made by Karna Kayasthas. Two other styles emerged within this period - the *Geru* style and the Tantric style. *Geru* style was made by Bhagvati Devi and Ookha Devi of village Jitwarpur, Tantric paintings representing *Dus Mahavidyas* were made by Tantric brothers Batoji Jha and Krishnanand Jha of village Harinagar (Chattopadhyaya 2005).

It was around the same time when Bhaskar Kulkarni encouraged Jamuna Devi from Chamar caste to experiment on the *Gobar* style of painting. Jamuna experimented with cowdung wash to represent events of day to day village life (Rekha 2003). Erika Smith encouraged Chano to experiment with Tattoo designs but these were simple primitive motifs devoid of any meaning. Till late 1970s, we do not have any evidence of Salhesa being represented in Mithila paintings. The famous book by Yves Vequaud, which brought worldwide popularity to Mithila paintings (Vequaud 1972) did not have any painting by Chamar and Dusadhs. It might be suggested that Raymond Lee Owens perhaps inspired Shanti Devi and other artists to experiment on their caste legends. The next part attempts to make a chronological account of the appearance of Salhesa iconography in Mithila paintings.

Salhesa : His Appearance in Mithila Art (1970 - 2010)

Salhesa is a very popular God in the villages of Mithila. Terracotta images of this God seated on a horse are a common site under a peepal, pakadi or a banyan tree. Many villages have *gahabars* of Salhesa where Salhesa is seated on an elephant with his brothers Budhesar and Motiram. Dauna Malin is seen with a flower basket. On the top of a *gahbar* are *chanwas* or *jhaap*. It was the image of Salhesa as seen in his *gahabar* which have been the favourites theme of Mithila painters. (Figure 3) With the growing popularity of Harijan Mithila paintings, different other scenes related to his life have made their appearance. There are two versions which are popular among scholars working on Mithila paintings. Grierson’s version has been popularly quoted by scholars. Jain has recorded a version of the story by Uttam Paswan (Jain 1996). Among the regional scholars, the version by Manipadmā seems to be popular (Maun and Neeraj 2002).

I have extensively interviewed the artists to record the history but no certain dating emerges, as artists did not have a tradition of maintaining any records of paintings. Although their oral accounts vary, it might be suggested that God Salhesa began to make his appearance in the late 1970s when Raymond started visiting Madhubani. Raymond had maintained an album which is very useful in constructing the history. Salhesa and Malin, three flower girls and his brothers first appear in his album. His video on Mithila painters also suggest a similar development (Video 1983). Based on photographic evidences, it might be suggested that Shanti Devi was the first artist to have introduced Salhesa within the pictorial vocabulary of Mithila art.
All these developments have taken place within a short span of forty years starting from the entry of Jamuna Devi to current day Tattoo paintings, the history of which has been traced in an earlier study by me in *Marg* (Rekha 2003). A look at the period between 1966-67 when Mithila paintings got commercialised and India Habitat exhibition showcasing current developments in Mithila art in the year 2007 give us a fair idea of the chronology. In the 1970s, we cannot have a definite idea of this iconography and theme in Mithila art as scholarly writings mostly refer to upper cast paintings. However, it can be said definitely that in the 1970s artists first made paintings in upper caste style depicting popular gods and goddesses which were commercially sold as Harijan Mithila paintings. It is only in the late 1970s that they moved on to make paintings on their gods and goddesses such as Rahu, Govinda and Salhesa when they became confident of themselves.
It is only in the 1980s that we start getting definite datings of Salhesa in Mithila art. The establishment of Master Craftsmen Association of Mithila (MCAM) in Jitwarpur gave a definite boost to the appearance of this God, apart from other factors such as Government training programmes and the intervention of Erika Moser. Thus EAF records suggest that in 1981 Jamuna Devi made three flower girls (Figure 4 and 5). Similarly, Geru paintings made by Sanjul Mandal in the album of Raymond show Salhesa and Malin being made in 1981. But it must be noted that artists such as Jamuna Devi and Bhagvati Devi, painted on different themes from day to day life which also included Salhesa (See Figure 6). It is in the works of Shanti Devi that the centrality of Salhesa themes can be traced. Also we might suggest that she was the first artist to have experimented beyond traditional gahabar representations to more complex imagery of oral stories of Salhesa. It was from Shanti Devi that the Dusadh artists of Jitwarpur such as Uttam Paswan picked up the stories, a process culminating in the appearance of Salhesa in Godana styles.
Figure 5 – Salhesa with malins, Jamuna Devi, Jitwarpur, 1981, Courtesy Szanton and Bakshi, EAF Catalogue, 2007.

Figure 6 - Salhesa and Dauna Malin in Gobar style by Geru artist Bhagyati Devi, Jitwarpur Personal Collection

Shanti Devi had recalled that she began making paintings on Salhesa legends deriving inspiration from her father-in-law, a Dusadh priest. Compared to other artists, she was educated and also aware of the political developments of the post-independent period. Records of her paintings can be found from 1977 in
Raymond Lee Owens album and EAF album (See EAF website). Two paintings of Salhesa by Shanti Devi dated 1983 are in EAF records which show Motiram and Budhesar (See Figure 7). These are simple paintings showing early style of Shanti Devi which used double parallel lines with dots and natural colours. A 1978 painting of Shanti Devi shows Korikanha, Salhesa’s nephew in the forest (See Figure 8).

Figure 7- Motiram with tigers, Shanti Devi, Jitwarpur, 1983, Courtesy Ethnic Arts Foundation, USA.
Wall murals of Salhesa were also experimented by Shanti Devi as can be seen from a survey conducted between 1983-85 (Lalit Kala Academy 1992). In the 1980s, Tokyo Hasegawa collected a lot of paintings for the Mithila museum. These paintings now in a catalogue also throw light on Salhesa in Mithila art. We cannot ascertain the datings of the paintings in the Mithila Museum as dates do not appear with the paintings. Most of Jamuna Devi’s paintings are simple and depict her traditional favourite themes. The records reveal that paintings by Shanti Devi and Seewan Paswan were based mostly on Salhesa legends. Tattoo paintings are all simple and are anonymous. Similar paintings can be seen in a survey by Lalit Kala Academy (1992).

In the 1990s, Salhesa paintings in Godana style began to be made. In Ray Owens album, we have tattoo paintings of Urmila Devi made in 1988. The motifs are made in simple black and white and show no trace of Salhesa. This suggests that Godana artists picked up Salhesa legends in the 1990s. This is corroborated by paintings preserved in the Crafts Museum, New Delhi. Jyotindra Jain too has recorded the version of Salhesa story as narrated by Uttam Paswan (Jain 1996). However, the article reveals Shanti Devi’s style in vogue. The most important development of this period is the introduction of Bansapti in Mithila paintings which resembles Goddess Durga in her representations. I have not seen Bansapti in Shanti Devi’s and Jamuna Devi’s work. Thus I suggest that Chano Devi might have introduced Bansapti within Mithila art. Also these paintings now began to be termed as Dusadh paintings.
From 1999 to 2004 – the period when I conducted my field work – numerous paintings of Salhesa could be found. Many paintings made in this period form part of my collection, some of them were published in *Marg* (Rekha 2003). I found in my field surveys that Salhesa was the most popular God among the artists of Madhubani. Not only Dusadhs but Jamuna Devi and Krishnakant Jha, a Mahaptra Brahamana artist made paintings on Salhesa in their respective styles. From 2005 onwards, David Szanton on behalf of EAF has collected numerous paintings. These have been published in a recent catalogue (Szanton and Bakshi 2007). The EAF collection on Salhesa in *Godana* style is available which show the evolution of Salhesa iconography.

These evidences thus suggest definitely that Salhesa iconography in Mithila paintings has evolved within a span of forty years starting from the late 1970s and acquiring a distinctive shape in the 1980s. The most favourite theme of the artists of Jitwarpur remained the representation of Salhesa with his consort Dauna Malin. Second in choice were the three flowers girls Dauna, Reshma and Kushuma, appearing in different forms and styles. The brothers of Salhesa, Motiram and Budhesar with the nephew Karikanha, were also represented frequently. However, the last theme to appear in Mithila art were the paintings on Bansapti who made her presence felt fully in the pictorial vocabulary of Dusadh Tattoo painters. The 1990s also witnessed the inclusion of geographical places of Salhesa stories in *Godana* paintings. From 1999 to 2004, paintings of Chano Devi gave meaning to the *Godana* designs of birds, dancers and animals. Salhesa, claimed to be the God of Dusadhs, also acquired a place in the paintings of Bhagvati Devi, who made Salhesa paintings in the pose of Indra and Indrani. From 2002 to 2012, different other styles of paintings have been recorded by Szanton such as insects in the garden of Salhesa, ghost of Salhesa and migrant workers (Szanton and Bakshi 2007).

I have attempted to evolve a rough chronology for a period of forty years. However, a complete picture of this art form cannot take into consideration just the recent research on Dalit art and Salhesa. Salhesa has been an integral part of Maithil culture which in turn suggests that Salhesa wall paintings might have made even before commercialisation. Most of the recent writings on Mithila art have suggested that Dalits never had the practice of elaborately decorating the walls of the houses. Archer’s article on Mithila painting had the plate of a horse by a Ahir community. Yves Vequaud’s book did not have a single specimen of Dalit art. Oral accounts of artists and preserved records suggest that Jamuna Devi, the first artists to enter as a painter never made paintings of Salhesa in the initial years of commercialisation. David Szanton in a recent paper writes that the first wall paintings of Dalits were recorded by Mary Lanius of Hanuman (Szanton forthcoming). However, investigation into regional history and a recent fieldwork done by me has revealed that wall paintings of Salhesa were also made before 1980. I quote three examples of Salhesa paintings to prove my point.

### Salhesa Iconography in Mithila: Some Unrecorded Examples

As early as 1958, a wall painting of Salhesa was recorded by Prafull Kumar Singh ‘Maun’ who happened to see this painting on the walls of a *gahabar* in Kamalpur, Darbhanga. This photograph, the first recorded history of a wall painting of Salhesa on a *gahabar*, was published in 1972 in Dharmayuga. According to Maun, the photograph was
taken around 1957-58 during his visit to village Kamalpur near Darbhanga. According to Maun, the painting was made in Basholi style (See Figure 9).

Figure 9 - Salhesa Wall painting, Kamalpur, Darbhanga, 1972, Courtesy Maun

The second recorded history of a painting of Salhesa is by Lakshminath Jha who in his book ‘Mithila Ki Sanskritika Lokchitrakala’ recorded the popular Maithil representation of Salhesa on a horse. It might be interesting to note here that this painting is shown alongside a painting of Ram as represented in terracottas. This is an interesting parallel to the current parallels drawn by artists in Jitwarpur (See Figure 10).
The third attempt to represent Salhesa painting beyond Madhubani and Darbhanga has been recently revealed to me in Vaishali style made by J P Kiran. This painting was brought to my notice during my recent ethnographic field work and was painted by artist JP Kiran who evolved a new style – the Vaishali style of painting. Here Salhesa is seen along with deities - Sitala mata and Hastikalash. According to Maun, Dusadhs used to carry their folk gods everywhere they went and this explains why Salhesa is popularly seen wherever Dusadhs have population (See Figure 11).

These examples seem to suggest that Salhesa’s importance in the oral traditions but also in the art of Mithila. Also it needs to be pointed out that several other paintings might have been made but they might not have been recorded. The records of the reports of Buchanan in the Purnea Gazetteer, oral version of Salhesa recorded by Grierson in his Maithil Chrestomathy and numerous oral versions recorded in plays, novels, radio plays and research publications in the post independent period (Maun 2002) testify to his importance in the region’s history. The legends of Salhesa in Mithila paintings carry with them all those vestiges of past history.
Some Observations on Recent Status

In the past few years, I have not seen paintings made by Shanti Devi as she has been more involved in NGO activities. Urmila Devi of Jitwarpur has been the most innovative of the contemporary artists. Her paintings attracted attention in an exhibition organised by Ethnic Arts Foundation in New Delhi in 2007 (Szanton Forthcoming). Jamuna Devi and Chano Devi have passed away in the past few years. The style of making double parallel lines has disappeared. The style of Jamuna Devi has only been carried forward by her daughter-in-law who has not absorbed any other style. Chano Devi’s style has become popular among the painters of Jitwarpur. Stalls selling Madhubani paintings in Dilli Haat provide a glimpse of the current situation which suggests the overwhelming presence of Tattoo paintings.

However, as most of these paintings are still being sold in craft melas, they appear to be primitive representations. Most of them are anonymous, have no signature and are out of context. The emergence of Salhesa iconography thus appears to be good exception as it might change the current scenario and attract the attention of future scholars working on Mithila art. I have observed that paintings bought at Dilli Haat by scholars have been explained in terms of Salhesa stories. I recently visited one of the stalls in the present Bihar Divas celebrations in Dilli Haat. Santosh Kumar, an artist from Jitwarpur showed me numerous paintings of Salhesa in different styles. He also gave me similar references of the places related with Salhesa such as Mahisautha and Phulbari as were given by Roudi Paswan and Chano Devi during my fieldwork in 1999-2004. A Salhesa painting beautifully framed found place along with Krishna and Rama themes. On being asked to give a name to these paintings, he proudly asserted these paintings were Mithila paintings. He did not want to categorise Salhesa painting within Harijan, Dusadh or Dalit art (Figure 12 and 13).
In the last ten years, I have got reports of cemented temples of Salhesa being built in Madhubani and Salhesa pujas celebrated with great pomp and show. The creation of a new category of Mahadalits by the current government, of the recent announcement of a School of Mithila art in Saurath, of the place given to Mithila paintings in the ongoing
Bihar divas celebrations and the current efforts going on to project Bihar internationally, might create a new chapter in the history of Salhesa in Mithila art. A Lalit Kala report suggests that many more gods and goddesses were painted in the 1980s. But when I conducted my research, I could never find those paintings in my survey. There have been exceptions of the mention of Lorik by Szanton (2007) Rahu by Jain (1996) and Rahu and Govind by Owens (Video 1983). But an overall analysis reveals that Salhesa has been the favourite theme of artists.

Nomenclature on Harijan Paintings of Mithila

Before ending the paper, a short comment on the nomenclature seems imperative. The chronology that I have evolved has traces of the different nomenclature through which this art form went through. Earlier known by the name of Harijan paintings of Mithila, Harijan Madhubani paintings, Harijan Tattoo (Jayakar, Anand 1982, Jain 1995, Rekha 2003), it became increasingly known as Dusadh painting styles of Mithila or Madhubani. Recently, the increasing impact of Dalit movement and the popularity of Mithila paintings on the life of Salhesa have led some scholars categorise these developments as “Dalit Intervention” (Szanton Forthcoming). These different names owe their origins to the different phases and influences through which Mithila art went through.

In the early stages of its evolution, artists themselves called these paintings as Harijan paintings for their veneration of Bhaskar Kulkarni and Upendra Maharathi, a Gandhia. Gradually due to influence of scholar activists, Mithila paintings based on the life histories of Salhesa has acquired different forms and names such as Dusadh paintings and Dalit paintings. It is interesting to observe that some scholars have also included the paintings made by Bhagvati Devi, an upper caste artist painting in the Geru style within Dalit painting. Of late, Dulari Devi’s paintings have been included within Dalit Mithila painting style although she hails from Mallah caste (See Figure 14).

Figure 14 - Life of the Mallah caste by Dulari Devi, Ranti
Concluding Observations

This paper has attempted to write a history of the evolution of Salhesa iconography based on scattered evidences. The task of evolving a chronology of Salhesa paintings in Mithila has been difficult as it has been a recent development. There is no denying the fact that scholarly attention was bestowed on Salhesa legends in paintings, more attention was given to the highly evolved iconography of upper caste paintings. However in a period of forty years, Salhesa iconography has not only evolved but also with the passage of time, different versions also have appeared. In their experimentations, all the important characters portrayed in the oral versions of Salhesa story have appeared. Geographical places related to his exploits falling in Nepal have also found representation within Mithila paintings. Thus we might say that developments of a number of centuries have appeared. The invention and reinvention of Salhesa continues to be made in Madhubani as can be seen in beautiful wall paintings.

Not only artists but also scholars like Nirala, Maun, Szanton have shown interest in the emergence of this God. A beginning has been made by scholars to provide context. Some initiatives have taken up at the local level by Nirala himself. Nirala in his article ‘Madhubani: A Contemporary History’ has urged scholars to explore the history of the region which have appeared through Madhubani art (Nirala 2011). Maun has untiringly worked for revival of interest in Salhesa. According to Maun, Salhesa is a historical figure in whose songs there have been a manifestation of *veer* and *sringar* emotions but also of the common shared heritage of the region. For Maun, Salhesa stands as a testimony of the period when Terai region of Nepal and Northern Bihar developed a unique culture known popularly as Maithil culture. He thus urges scholars to initiate a dialogue and research on the story of Salhesa. In the past two years, scholars such as Szanton and Peter Zirnis have shown interest and written on Salhesa.

I end my article with a favourite song sung by the people of Morang about Salhesa. Quoting from the Gun *gitas* of Nepal, Maun writes ‘*Nila Varan Keri Ghoda Re Salhesa Dev Samu Re Varan Aswaar*’ meaning that the black coloured Salhesa is riding on a blue horse (Maun and Neeraj, 2002). This black coloured Salhesa has not only been retained in the folk memory of Maithil people but has also stayed in the vocabulary of Mithila painters. It might be suggested that if we are able to get more paintings of Salhesa in future and if they are dated correctly, the history of evolution of this God traced in this paper could further be completed. Also if an effort is made on the part of artists, scholars and art lovers to establish contextual meanings, these paintings might further acquire recognition. Whatever might be the case, there is no doubt about the fact that Salhesa is there to stay in the pictorial vocabulary of Mithila painters. It is for the future researchers to see how Salhesa stories will unfold.

Acknowledgements

My journey into the world of painters of Madhubani has been a fascinating one providing me answers for all the questions that I have posed for my fieldwork. I am extremely thankful to the artists in Jitwarpur for providing me information about the history of Salhesa iconography in Mithila paintings, Professor Narendra Narayan Sinha ‘Nirala’ for helping me in my fieldwork, David Szanton for probing me about the history of Salhesa.
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**Videos**


**Notes**

1. Pupul Jayakar was the chairperson of Handloom Handicrafts Export Corporation (HHEC) and the main force behind the commercialisation of Madhubani (Maithil) Painting. Upendra Maharathi, an artist, designer and a Gandhian was involved in the promotional programme of Madhubani art. Many of the earlier paintings of 1960s and 1970s can be viewed in the Upendra Maharathi Institute for Industrial Design, Digha, Patna. Bhaskar Kulkarni was the field office in charge of the drought relief programme in Madhubani. Under his guidance women artists evolved distinctive styles such as Geru, Tantric and Gobar and Godana. Bhaskar is also credited with discovering Worli paintings made by the tribals in Maharashtra.

2. Erika Moser, a German anthropologist and folk-lorist whose most significant contribution lay in the evolution of Tattoo painting, besides the production of 19 short films on paintings and related subjects.

3. Yves Vequaud, a French journalist and film maker was the first to arrive in Mithila in1973.

4. Raymond Lee Owens, an American anthropologist did a 15 month cultural study of Jitwarpur and founded the Master Craftsmen's Association of Mithila( MCAM) in 1977. This organisation later on evolved into the Ethnic Arts Foundation, USA.

5. The last foreigner to visit Madhubani in 1989 was Tokio Hasegawa, a Japanese whose Mithila Museum in Japan has concentrated totally on the acquisition, display and research of Mithila paintings.

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