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SIKKI WALL HANGINGS - AN INNOVATIVE VETIVER ART DEVELOPED IN MITHILA AREA OF NORTH BIHAR, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

*Mithila area in north Bihar is known for its rich culture that is depicted in the form of varied art forms like Mithila painting and grass based craft. Container based Sikki items were traditionally carved from the stalks of vetiver grass through weaving. A recent innovation in Sikki art, initiated some three decades back by **Rachna Sikki Hastakala Kendra** at village Rampur in Pandaul block of Madhubani district is based on bending-cutting-pasting method. This has led to the carving of exquisite wall hangings that have become popular and are in high demand from even foreign countries. Vetiver stalks, technically the peduncle of the poaceous grass *Chrysopogon zizanioides* (L.) Roberty, provide the basic raw material for this art. This multifaceted grass is also worshipped in this region as a sequel to sun worship and provides a fine example of land conservation practice deeply entrenched in Mithila culture.*

Mithila area in north Bihar is known for its rich culture that finds manifestation in the form of Mithila painting and carving of grass based containers of various hues (Jha and Basak 1994, Jha *et al* 1994, Jha 2004 etc.). There is a practice of planting vetiver and other grasses for stabilisation of sand in the floodplains (Jha *et al* 2014). Vetiver has a great potential for rural development (Jha and Saha 2006, 2016). Progressive farmers are now

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integrating vetiver plantations with staple crops, medicinal plants and timber tree (Jha *et al* 2015).

Vetiver grass grows abundantly in the flood plains of Mithila region of Bihar. Its earlier name *Vetiveria zizanioides* has now been changed to *Chrysopogon zizanioides*. Stalks of this grass are collected by the rural women after the rains come to an end. This multifaceted grass (known as **Katarajhar** in Mithila region) is now cultivated for its aromatic roots. The late king of Thailand (Bhumol Adulyadej) was a great connoisseur of this grass where it was assigned the status of a royal grass. The grass is eulogised for its high capacity of soil binding. It was during his life time that his birthday, the 5th of December was christened as World Soil Day, keeping in view his contributions in this endeavour. The grass is extensively planted for amelioration of soil health in several countries. It is also planted alongside the national highways and railway lines, to ensure their safety against high floods.



Rural women in worshipping vetiver

Mithila region formally grass on the occasion of

initiation and conclusion of **Ravivrata** The grass has a sacred status in India. Its fragrant roots are used for making garlands, curtains and head fans. '**Garud Puran**' refers to its ritualistic use in **Dashgaatkarma** performed after the death of Hindus. Vetiver root is formally put in a chest on the occasion of Deepawali, wishing blessings of the Goddess of Wealth. An innovative form of Sikki art, mainly in the form of **wall hanging** was innovated by Shri Dharendra Kumar, son of Sri Jagat Narayan Das of village Rampur in Pandaul C.D. block of Madhubani district in Mithila region of north Bihar. He was born on the 17th July 1967. He set up Rachna Sikki Hastakala Kendra at his village. As against the traditional Sikki art, based on making containers of various shapes obtained through weaving the stalks, this new form is based on bending-cutting-pasting method. About 600 women and 100 men have been trained by him in the process of carving exquisite wall hangings made of the vetiver stalk that is technically the peduncle of its inflorescence that is available at the end of rainy season.

Sri Kumar has been decorated with several awards for his contribution in Sikki Art. These include- State Award by the Udyog Vibhag of the Govt. of Bihar (2015-16) and National Award by the Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India (2016). Dastakar (an NGO working in the field of Art) has also appreciated his contribution. He has trained artists as invited resource person at the Patna based Upendra Maharathi Shilp Anusandhan Sansthan (June, 2017) and at Patna and Kangra based National Institutes of Fashion Technology.



Teachers and Students of the Six-month certificate course in Sikki art offered by the faculty of Fine Arts, L.N. Mithila University, Darbhanga. L to R front row- 1. Prof. L.K. Singh, 2. Mrs. Sudhira Devi (another accomplished traditional Sikki artist), 3. Present author and 4. Sri Dharendra Kumar

To promote his endeavour District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Madhubani established a centre at his village that was later taken over by the Union Ministry of Textiles. This Common Facility Center was initiated for promoting this innovative form of Sikki art. The noted folk artist Padmashri Malini Awasthi was presented a Sikki portrait of herself made by his center during her visit to Darbhanga in a seminar '**Lok Ke Rang**' organised by the faculty

of Fine Arts, L.N. Mithila University on the 3rd March 2021.



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Vetiver has attracted a wider scientific attention that is evidenced by the organisation of seven International Conferences on Vetiver (ICV). ICV-5 was held at the CSIR-CIMAP (Central

Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants), Lucknow during Oct.-Nov 2011. This author had an occasion to participate in this conference. King of Thailand Vetiver Awards and TVNI (The Vetiver Network International) Awards were conferred on this occasion.



Bihar Industries Minister Shahnawaj Hussain presenting a Sikki Wall Hanging depicting Lord Buddha to the Hon'ble President of India Sri Ram Nath Kovind, during his recent visit to Patna.

Vetiver items have a rare property of evading the attack by insects and other pests. It is on this ground that household items like spices and masticatories are preserved in the Sikki containers for long time.
