

The Mashland Mats of Purba and Paschim Medinipur

*¹Mirdda Ila & ²Dr. Debalina Debnath

¹Ph. D. Research Scholar, Department of Folklore, University of Kalyani

²Assistant Professor, Department of Folklore, University of Kalyani

ABSTRACT

Mat is a popular item in West Bengal and is used for sitting, sleeping, home decoration, usable product and in religious festivals. The madur plant is a grass reared in the agricultural fields. Its scientific name is '*Cyperus tegetum* Roxb'. The mat is woven on a simple bamboo frame loom and machine loom. The wrap is cotton thread and the weft is a soft thin reed which is called as *Madurkathi*. Five types of mats are woven which are Single, Double, Folding, Mashland, die stick mat. This handicraft industry is predominantly associated with the agro-based rural economy. Now-a-days, the mat not only prevails in the domestic sphere but it is found in the global arena also. Artisans have diversified their products from mat weaving to other products like multi-use baskets, sofa cover, wall hangings adding to the essence of home decoration. The artisans of the Mashland mats have received honor and fame for their unique creations. In rural areas of Purba and Paschim Medinipur, the Mashland mat has revolutionized the traditional mat industry. The intention of this study is to highlight the present situation of Mashland mat in Bengal.


Keywords: *Madurkathi, Mashland mat, Natural colour, Rope, Pata, Rangchita tree.*

Article Publication

Published Online: 15-Apr-2021

*Author's Correspondence

Mirdda, Ila

 Ph. D. Research Scholar, Department of Folklore, University of Kalyani

 [ilamirdda\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:ilamirdda[at]gmail.com)

© 2021 The Authors. Published by *Research Review Journals*

This is an  open access article under the

CC BY-NC-ND license



(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

1. Introduction

The need of the society and the emotions of the artisans are associated with the folk-culture. Various cottage industries have been generated from emotions. Human beings are creative creatures. Folk-artists are the ideal persons of developed fine crafts. The folk-artists can make progress of the society through their artistry in cottage industry. There is no gender difference visible in mat industry. The emergence, gradual advancement and transition of folk-culture in Bengal is ancient. The century-old evolution and practice of folk-culture in Bengal is very much mingled with the social life of the common mass.

2. History of Naming Mashland Mat

The Mashland mats are being in use from ancient times. It is believed that during Mughal period, King Shah Jahan's wife, Mumtaz who was also known by Arjumand Banu Begam, presented Mashland to the king. Then the king named the mat as Masnad. From that time onwards, the word Masnad was transformed into Mashland. On the other hand, some people say that in ancient time there was a village known as Mashlandpur under Tamluk block which was famous for Mashland mats. Tamluk or Tamralipta was an important port at that time. So, the origin of the name Mashland might be from the name of the village.

3. Area

The Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts of West Bengal are the hub of cottage industry. Earlier we used to get these mats in Narajol and Kashijora during the time of Nawab Alibardi Khan in 1744. Paschim Medinipur is one of the centres of Mashland mat creation. The Sabang block of Paschim Medinipur is the nucleus of mat industry. Sarta, Nila, Pingla, Moharh are the different areas of

Sabang block which are renowned for high quality mat production. Kholaberia region of Ramnagar-1 in Purba Medinipur is also famous for mat production.

4. Types of Mats

There can be various types of mats like Single Mat, Double Mat, Folding Mat and Mashland Mat. These four types of mats are more common in practice although one more type of mat known as Die Stick Mat is available but it is manufactured in less quantity. The appearance and colour of Mashland mats are totally different from other mats.

5. Data Source and Methodology

Field survey is an excellent procedure for research study. That is why I have also given much importance to field survey by which authentic information is available to me through correct analysis. In my study, field survey is the primary source of data and various documents like literatures, articles, journals etc. are the secondary sources of data which have helped me a lot. For primary source, the following were kept in mind while collecting data :

- Area Selection
- Study of the topic.
- Selection of interviewee.
- Questionnaire.

For secondary data, help was taken from different books, research papers, articles and research materials from various libraries. The research was carried out with the help of different methods like Historical-geographic method, Anthropological method, Sociological method, Folk-loristic method, Psychological method etc.

To accomplish the research article, the methodology and data sources adopted were in two phases – 1. Data Collection Method and 2. Procedure of Data Analyses. Observations and interviews have played a greater role in data collection. Primary data were being collected through data collection method from a few areas of West Bengal. I have collected data from Alok Kumar Jana and Gouri Rani Jana, both were from Sarta Sabang, Paschim Medinipur on 20.12.2019. Information were also collected from Nishikanta Das from Sarta, Sabang, Paschim Medinipur and Arun Khatua from Pingla, Sabang, Paschim Medinipur on 21.12.2019. Data were also collected from Sarayu Bala Giri, Kholaberia, Ramnagar–1, Purba Medinipur and others.

6. Materials and Equipments

Fine mat sticks and threads are the materials of Mashland mats. The materials and equipments of Mashland mats are described in details below :

a) Materials :

1. **Rope :** The rope or thread of Mashland mats is very fine and smooth. Fine threads are used in the middle and relatively more thick threads are used in both the margins. This thread is available from jute or silk.
2. **Colour :** Colour is very important in Mashland mats. Colours make the mats more appealing just like ladies wore ornaments to make themselves more fascinating. Simple natural colours were being used previously. But now a change has come in the use of chemical and artificial colours alongwith natural colours. Some artists are using both types of colours in their works. According to them mixing of artificial colours with natural colours make the blended colour more bright and long lasting. At present artificial colours after being tested and observed are being used in parallel to natural colours because these colours last for many years. Various leaves, flower, fruit, seeds, bark of trees etc. are used as natural colours. The ingredients of natural colours are used from the nature. Red colour is obtained from Rangchita tree. The stem of the tree is cut into small pieces and dried up. When the colour is required, the pieces are boiled in water. The mat sticks are immersed in this boiled water for a certain time period as per necessity. Black colour is obtained from Haritaki tree. Brown colour from Khayer. A type of dark colour is obtained from bark and fruit of Babla tree. It is blended with other colours to get different types of colours. I have got various information on colours from colour and design specialist Nishikanta Das who stays at Sarta. In this way the artists use natural and chemicals colours.
3. **Mat Stick :** The scientific name of the tree is *Cyperus tegetum* Roxb. The fine mat sticks are taken out from inside the tree. The best quality stick is used in fabricating Mashland mats. The mat sticks are taken from field, dried in the sunrays, cut in

sizes and immersed in colours. After a certain time the submerged sticks are boiled in coloured water. This process is completed in some phases. More time the sticks are immersed in water, the more will be its brightness. At the time of knitting, the artist uses nails and teeth to bifurcate the sticks to make Mashland mats. Somebody uses blade to split the stick finely and do knitting according to Mashland design.

b) Equipments

1. **Bamboo** : Bamboo is an important tool in making Mashland mats. Four bamboo sticks are placed in length and breadth. Layer of threads are put within this bamboo frame. Bamboo is very important for thread fitting.
2. **Pata or Jata** : This tool is made up of wood. All mats are not knitted with one Pata or Jata. The tool is different according to the mats to be made. Since the Mashland mats are fine mats, so the in-between holes of this tool are very tiny for making them. The Jata is inserted into the threads so as to keep the sticks in a row. After three or four sticks are knitted, the Pata or Jata is again used to make the sticks straight in a row.
3. **Takta** : The wooden chair which is used by the artist to sit while making the mats.
4. **Dhera** : This tool is used to twist the rope or thread.
5. **Knife** : The knife is used to cut threads, to make mat sticks fine and to cut the unnecessary portions to increase their looks.
6. **Wooden Frame** : A wooden frame is also used.

7. Motifs used in Mashland Mats

The beautiful Mashland mats are created with the materials and equipments discussed above. Since the medieval age, the Mashland mats are beautiful and glorious. The folk culture is educationally impartial. The easily available materials which are for traditional and regular use are the artistic expressions of the collective thoughts of the folk society. Motif is a specific noteworthy constituent of folk-culture. This motif is not any mark, but it is a symbol or icon which has a special meaning and explanation. Usually different types of motifs are available which are listed below.

1. Solar system oriented.
2. Plant kingdom related.
3. Animal kingdom centric.
4. Geometrical shapes related.

The above all motifs are used in Mashland mats. Apart from this, mythological stories, various images, maps etc. are exhibited by the artists in their creations.

8. Knitting Process

A rectangle is created with four bamboo sticks. A bed of threads is created lengthwise and breadthwise. Lengthwise comparatively thick thread and fine threads are used in between them to cover the area. Then mat sticks are inserted within the threads and Jata or Pata are used to make them equal. The artist inserts mat sticks inside the threads according to the design. After completion of the knitting, the unnecessary parts of the sticks are cut away widthwise to make them equal. The minimum time required for making a Mashland mat is one to two months.

9. Price and Other Mashland Products

The price of a Mashland mat is much higher than other mats. The price of Mashland mat depends on its sizes, designs and appearances. The big size mats of 60" × 45" costs from thirty thousand to even one lakh. Apart from making Mashland mats, coloured and white sticks are used to create various types of yoga mats, files, covers, wall hangings, hat, table mats etc.

10. Recognition of the Artists

Many artists are being rewarded for the designs of these mats. All over the world, these artists are getting recognition for their craftsmanship. Medinipur district of West Bengal is always famous for Mashland mats. The artists are going to various places within country or abroad to attend art festivals, selling their products and imparting brief or extensive training. The names of some artists who went outside India in recent times are given below :

- a) Gouri Rani Jana went to Kyrgyzstan.
- b) Nishikanta Das went to Fagun festival held in London.

- c) Mithurani Jana went to Karlsruhe festival in Germany.
- d) Akhil Jana went to Norway to impart mat-related training.

The artists have received various awards in different times for their artistry. Some of them are Pushparani Jana (1980), Sarayu Bala Giri (1988), Alok Jana (2008), Tapas Jana (2018) and Mithurani Jana (2019) who have received awards from President of India.

11. Conclusion

They are also called design mats since the design of Mashland mats are very attractive. Some people also call this Mashland mat as Masina. The Mashland is a result of a long-time effort. The fine and perfect knitting of Mashland mats makes art-loving people astonished. The artist exhibits creativeness through wonderful ornamental work. Various transitions are noticed now-a-days in this mat-making industry than before like change in design, colour and varied products other than mats only.

This is what I believe that Mashland mat will continue to persist in future with the glory and admiration that it holds at present. So in the poetic words of the artist, it can be said in Bengali –

“Joto din dehe ache pran pranpone rekhe jabo madurer somman”.

It means the days that I live, I will keep the prestige high of these mats ardently.

References

1. Ahmed, T. (1994) : ‘Lok Shilper Bhubone’, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
2. Babcock, G. P. (1961) : ‘Webster’s Third New International Dictionary’, Cambridge University.
3. Bhowmik, A. (2016) : ‘Medinikatha’, Arindam, Medinipur.
4. Chowdhury, D. (ed.) (2004) : ‘Banglar Lok Sanskriti Biswakosh’, Academy of Folklore, Kolkata.
5. Das, B. (2015) : ‘Madur Pujar Lokachar’, Pingla, Paschim Medinipur.
6. Gangopadhyay, K. K. (1368, Bangabda) : ‘Banglar Lok Shilpa’, Kolkata.
7. Ghosh, S. K. (1996) : ‘Banglar Kutir Shilpa’, Dey’s Publishing, Kolkata.
8. Hossain, Md. J. (2016) : ‘Lok Shilpa’, Bangladesh Viswavidyalay Manjuri Commission, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
9. Maity, P. K. (2001) : ‘Medinipurer Lok Sanskriti’, Purbadri Prakashani, Kolkata.
10. Santra, T. (2000) : ‘Paschimbanger Lok Shilpa O Shilpi Samaj’, Lok Sanskriti O Adibashi Sanskriti. Kendra, Tathya Sanskriti Bibhag, Kolkata.
11. <https://banglayourstory.com>
12. <https://lokkfolk.blogspot.in>
13. <https://nilanjanbasu.files.wordpress.com>
14. <https://www.bhorerkagoj.net/print-edition/2016/07/20/98365.php>.
15. <https://www.craftandartisans.com>
16. <https://www.craftrevival.org>
17. <https://www.pelagiaresearchlibrary.com>
18. <https://www.spaceandculture.in>