Maithil Story Paintings

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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol34/iss1/6
These images were painted by a Maithil woman in Janakpur, Nepal. Maithil women have become known internationally for their colorful paintings replete with scenes from great epics and deities of the region, as well as depictions of the plants and animals that are integral to their lives. This painting tradition has evolved into a form of tourist art used for income generation in local women's development organizations. In Madhubani, on the Indian side of the border, the painting tradition has evolved into a more refined style featuring recognized 'artists' and distributed in 'fine art' as opposed to 'tourist art' venues. The author [Davis, this volume] commissioned a series of paintings from two women's development projects in Janakpur, the Janakpur Women's Development Center and the Women's Development Service Center. The paintings illustrate the tales Davis recorded in 2003–2004 as part of her study of Maithil women's storytelling, resulting in the forthcoming volume, *Maithil Women's Tales: Storytelling on the Nepal-India Border* (University of Illinois Press, 2014).

Below: Illustration from a Maithil woman’s tale in which a husband journeys forth on a horse while his bride remains behind, waiting within the walls of their home.

Opposite: Illustration of the Friends Tale: this painting depicts a beautiful cobra princess crying at the bottom of a pond, while the king’s son and dewan’s son descend a ladder and discover her there.

Following page: Illustration from the Eagle and Jackal Tale: The painting depicts a tree with an eagle in the upper branches and a jackal in its lair down below. In the tale, the Eagle's devout behavior results in her rebirth as a righteous queen who bears many children, whereas the Jackal’s immoral behavior results in her rebirth as a barren queen whose evil doings lead to her own demise.