INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HISTORY

E-ISSN: 2706-9117
P-ISSN: 2706-9109
www.historyjournal.net
IJH 2023; 5(2): 141-146
Received: 02-07-2023
Accepted: 23-08-2023

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Sacred pluralities: Religion, cults, and tantric practices in medieval Mithilā

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DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.22271/27069109.2023.v5.i2b.542

Abstract
This paper examines the multifaceted religious landscape of medieval Mithilā, a region that evolved into a vibrant crucible of diverse belief systems, ritual practices, and philosophical thought. While Vedic orthodoxy laid the initial foundation, Mithilā also preserved strong non-Vedic elements such as the cult of Śiva's bow, Śālagrāma worship, and indigenous ancestor rituals. The Upaniṣadic dialogues of Janaka and Yājñavalkya reveal both resistance to Brahmanical hierarchy and the rise of speculative spiritual traditions. Jainism and Buddhism further enriched the intellectual and ascetic milieu of the region, leaving enduring legacies despite their later decline and absorption into the Hindu fold.

By the medieval period, Hindu devotional currents, including Śaivism, Śāktism, and Vaiṣṇavism, had gained predominance, producing a corpus of Maithili literature, particularly in the works of Vidyāpati, that emphasized divine unity while affirming plural modes of worship. Nevertheless, it was Tantricism that provided the most integrative framework, assimilating local cults, domestic rituals, agrarian festivals, and esoteric practices into a comprehensive religious system. Tantric cults of goddesses such as Tārā, Ugratārā, and Katyāyanī, alongside widespread household rituals like *aripāna* and *gosāinī pūjā*, reveal the penetration of Tantra into both elite and popular religiosity.

The study argues that Mithilā's religious history exemplifies the processes of negotiation, synthesis, and transformation through which Indian religiosity as a whole evolved. Sacred pluralities in Mithilā were not static co-existences but dynamic intertwinings that made the region a microcosm of India's broader religious culture.

Keywords: Mithilā, Śaivism, Śāktism, Vaiṣṇavism, Tantricism, Jainism, Buddhism, Vidyāpati, religious pluralism, medieval India

Introduction
Defining religion has long posed both practical and conceptual challenges to scholars across disciplines. Despite these difficulties, there is a broad consensus on its inherently multidimensional nature. Religion is not merely a personal expression of faith or metaphysical belief; it also manifests in myths, rituals, doctrines, theological discourse, mystic experiences, ethical norms, and, most crucially, in collective social practices. It encompasses a rich spectrum of sects, cults, and devotional traditions that shape and are shaped by the cultural and historical contexts in which they emerge [1].

In this sense, religion functions both as an individual framework of belief and a collective social reality. Groups of people are often united not by kinship, ethnicity, or occupation, but by shared ritual devotion to a deity or tradition. Such associations, which transcend conventional social categories, are often best exemplified by the concept of *sampradāya* (religious order) in Hinduism. These orders, whether devoted to Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śakti, or other deities, anchor their spiritual lineage in the teachings of revered gurus or ascetics. Despite variations in caste or region, adherents experience ritual and philosophical unity, a phenomenon mirrored in the sectarian formations of Buddhism, Tantricism, and the Bhakti movements as well [2].

This paper examines such religious formations in medieval Mithilā, a region that holds a unique place in the religious and cultural history of eastern India. According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Mithilā was the first region in Bihar to undergo Aryanization, a process spearheaded by the legendary sage Videgha Māṭhava [3]. With this came the introduction of Vedic religion and rituals, which interacted with and gradually incorporated older, non-Vedic belief systems. Over the centuries, Mithilā became a crucible of religious diversity, where Śaivism, Śāktism, Vaiṣṇavism, Buddhism, Jainism, and most notably, Tantra, flourished, contended, and intertwined.

Through this inquiry, the paper aims to understand how these sacred pluralities, institutional, esoteric, and vernacular, shaped the spiritual life of medieval Mithilā. It aims to go beyond textual traditions to investigate how cultic practices, ritual art, temple networks, gendered worship, and everyday customs contributed to a uniquely syncretic and dynamic religious culture.

Pluralities in Belief: Vedic and Non-Vedic Traditions

Vedic and non-Vedic elements have always interacted in the development of Mithilā's religious culture. The area proudly boasted of a rich native belief system based on natural worship, a cult of the dead, and local gods before Vedic ritualism became institutionalized. These non-Vedic cultures tended to be animistic and polytheistic with an orientation to mountains, rivers, sacred stones, symbols of fertility, and forces of the underworld. Although later Brahmanical religion tried to usurp or sideline these cults, the lines of many ritual traces and symbols of theirs were not destroyed, and these cult traces were gradually absorbed into the growing Hindu pantheon.

The veneration of the bow of Śiva, which is believed to have been kept in the palace at Mithilā since the reign of King Devavṛata, to Janaka, is one of the most conspicuous instances [4]. This bow, besides being a mythological object and playing a significant part in the Rāmāyaṇa legend, is also a token of pre-Vedic Śaiva worship, which was independent of Brahmanical orthodoxy. The support for this precept in Mithilā in worshipping Śiva today highlights the historical continuity of this practice. In parallel, local stone and water cults are plausibly the origin of worshiping the sides of a river (along the Gaṇḍakī River), which was later incorporated into Vaiṣṇava devotionalism as worship of the deities associated with the Śālagrāma stones [5].

The other distinct trace of non-Vedic religiosity is the worship of the ancestors, which is done through the making of funereal mounds (funerary mound) (Ancestor worship). These were commonly associated with clan totems or ancestral spirits, and they were not approved by the early Vedic sacrificial systems, which discouraged such open worship of the dead [6]. Aspects of tribal and totemic culture were also integral to the religious culture of Mithilā, including the worship of snakes (Manasā pūjā), cults of mother goddesses, and appeasing forest spirits.

There was an Aryanization process as the Vedic faith penetrated Mithilā, and in large part this was due to the missionary efforts of sages such as Gautama. A new culture of the sacrificial system (yajna), vocal liturgies, and Brahmanical rituals started to transform the spiritual sphere. Throughout history, Vedic religion has gained greater formality and structure, centralized the priests, and excluded popular worship.

Nevertheless, this transition did not come easily. Spiritual countercurrents are well-documented in the Upaniṣadic era, particularly during the reign of Janaka Videha, who challenged the priestly monopoly by claiming the right to perform sacrifices without the intercession of the Brahmins [7]. This was a political move too, but also one that created possible room to think about religious authority and his spirituality.

It was an intense intellectual milieu celebrated at the court of Janaka, in which Yājñavalkya, Gārgī and Maitreyi debated intensely over the nature of self (ātman), ultimate reality (brahman), and liberation (mokṣa). Through such theorising, they criticised Vedic ritualism as being externalist in outlook and focused rather on interior and metaphysical exploration; this prepared the way for Upaniṣadic spirituality, which would have a specifically Mithilā root [8].

Overall, the religious development of Mithila in the period required not merely the replacement of a non-Vedic dominance with a Vedic one, but rather a dialectical oscillation of conflicting, assimilation, and synthesis. The territory became a holy convergence of tribal, folk, Brahmanical, and thought ways, in which pluralities of belief not only coexisted but also tended to enrich one another in subtle and enduring ways.

Śramaṇic Traditions in Mithilā

The region of Mithilā occupies a significant position in the religious history of eastern India, particularly as a site where Jainism and Buddhism flourished alongside and in competition with Brahmanical traditions. The Jain tirthankara Vardhamāna Mahāvīra was born at Kuṇḍagrāma near Vaiśālī, and much of his missionary activity unfolded within the cultural and political bounds of Bihar, with Mithilā forming a crucial sphere of influence [9]. Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang), visiting in the 7th century CE, still found the Jaina *Nirgrantha* community predominant in Vaiśālī, indicating the depth of the tradition's roots in the region [10].

Buddhism, too, had deep historical associations with Mithilā. Siddhārtha Gautama, born in Lumbinī, practised asceticism for six years before attaining enlightenment at Bodhgayā [11]. While Sārnātha was his primary preaching ground, Vaiśālī emerged as a major center of Buddhist monastic life. It was here that the Second Buddhist Council was convened, resulting in important disciplinary concessions to monks and nuns, an indication of the region's role in shaping doctrinal developments [12]. Historical sources record that the Licchavis of Vaiśālī regarded the Buddha as their principal political and spiritual adviser.

By the medieval period, however, Buddhism had entered a phase of decline in Mithilā. The process of Hindu assimilation absorbed the Buddha into the Brahmanical pantheon, as reflected in Caṇḍeśvara's ritual calendar specifying a dedicated day for the Buddha's worship [13]. The 13th-century Tibetan monk Dharmasvāmin observed that non-Buddhists outnumbered Buddhists in India, noting the similarities between image worship in Buddhist and Hindu shrines, and commenting on the rising popularity of the Mahāyāna goddess Tārā as well as the pervasiveness of Tantric practices in Bihar [14].

Dharmasvāmin's account also reveals the points of theological divergence between Buddhists and Hindus, including Buddhist disapproval of animal sacrifice,especially the ritual slaughter of cattle before deities such as Kālī and Maheśvara,and criticism of the Hindu conception of a permanent soul (*ātman*) [15]. Such debates, however, were confined mainly to scholarly and monastic circles. Literary evidence, such as the works of Jyotiriśvara, reveals polemical denunciations of Buddhism; however, these did not prevent more pragmatic relations at the local level, where Hindus and Buddhists exchanged gifts and even offered alms across sectarian boundaries [16].

Royal patronage for Buddhist monastics in Mithilā, though rare in the later period, is exemplified by King Rāmasiṁha of Tirhut, who reportedly invited Dharmasvāmin to serve as

his chaplain and, upon refusal, honoured him with generous gifts [17]. Nonetheless, Buddhist communities faced episodes of severe hostility, such as the massacre attributed to Dronwāra Purāditya of Rājā Banaulī, as preserved in local tradition [18].

Ultimately, Jainism and Buddhism were unable to maintain robust institutional foundations in medieval Mithilā. However, their legacies persisted,Buddhism through its absorption into Hindu devotionalism and Tantric forms, and Jainism through scattered but enduring communities leaving an indelible mark on the region's religious plurality.

The Sacred Triad and Beyond: Deities of Medieval Mithilā

By the late medieval period, both Buddhism and Jainism had declined in Mithilā, leaving the field largely to Brahmanical Hinduism. Nevertheless, this was not a homogeneous system: instead, it represented a confluence of Śaiva, Śākta, Vaiṣṇava, and Tantric traditions [19]. The consolidation of these sects was partly the outcome of the intellectual resistance mounted by Maithila logicians against Buddhist scholasticism and partly the result of the integrative power of devotional and Tantric practices.

The poet-philosopher Vidyāpati, perhaps the most important cultural voice of medieval Mithilā, offers critical insights into this religious pluralism. He notes that amidst disputes between Buddhists, heterodox groups, and Vedic ritualists, even learned men could lose sight of righteousness, which for him lay in austerity, devotion, and reverence to the Almighty [20]. In his writings, Vidyāpati repeatedly emphasises that Śiva and Viṣṇu were not antagonistic but two forms of the same supreme divinity, while Śakti and Gaṅgā also occupy central places in popular devotion. The Kṛṣṇa-bhakti tradition was gaining firm ground during this period, as evidenced by Vidyāpati's lyrical corpus and the works of Umāpati and Govindadāsa [21].

The Brahmanical Trinity and Tantric Synthesis

Sources, such as the Kṛtya Ratnākara, reveal that Brahmā's cult was in decline, while Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Śakti became the dominant triad in Mithilā [22]. This was not merely a matter of sectarian competition, but also of Tantric harmonisation, which sought to synthesise the three currents into a unified spiritual framework. This "Trinitarianism" was strengthened by ritual practices that blended sectarian boundaries: for example, the threefold marks on the foreheads of Maithila devotees, ashes for Śiva, sandal paste for Viṣṇu, and vermilion for Śakti, symbolised a shared ritual allegiance [23].

The multiplicity of cults was not confined to the great triad. Local traditions of worship centred around Sūrya, Kārtikeya, Hanumān, Balarāma, Aniruddha, Pradyumna, Rāma, and Bhairava were equally significant. The Sun temple at Kandāhā (Saharsa), dedicated to Bhavāditya, attests to the importance of solar worship in Mithilā, with similar evidence from inscriptions and the *Kṛtya Ratnākara* [24]. Archaeological finds from sites such as Bheet Bhagwānpur, Bahera, Birpur, and Champāran further attest to the wide distribution of images and shrines dedicated to these deities, which also served as focal points for regional fairs and seasonal congregations [25].

Śiva and Śakti Devotion

Śiva worship in Mithilā had deep pre-Vedic roots and retained immense popularity throughout the medieval period. Temples dedicated to Śiva were widespread, and Vidyāpati's *Likhnāvalī* testifies to the institutional arrangements made for Mahādeva's worship [26]. Vidyāpati's Śaiva lyrics (*Maheśavāṇī*) portray Śiva as the compassionate giver of *mokṣa*, accessible to all. The continued observance of Śivarātri and Śivacaturdaśī in Mithilā reflects this devotional continuity [27].

Śakti worship was equally vibrant, both in domestic cults and in public ritual spaces. Writers like Devāditya, Vardhamāna, and Madana were closely associated with goddess traditions [28]. As M.M. Gaṅgānātha Jhā has shown, the first verse taught to a Maithila child in traditional pedagogy was often in praise of Śakti, underscoring her centrality in household and educational culture [29]. The Gosaunīghara rituals, the feeding of Kumārīs, the prevalence of Mātṛkā worship in households, and the non-vegetarian Sābara rites of women all point to the persistence of powerful goddess traditions, which were further reinforced by Tantric practices [30].

Vaiṣṇava Devotion

The growth of Vaiṣṇavism in Mithilā was marked by the composition of vast devotional literature in Maithili and Sanskrit. Vidyāpati, Umāpati, and Govindadāsa drew extensively upon the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, producing Krishnaite songs and hymns that were widely circulated [31]. The merging of vernacular poetry with bhakti made Vaiṣṇava devotion deeply embedded in the everyday cultural life of Mithilā.

Folk Cults and Syncretic Practices

The religious life of Mithilā was also shaped by numerous folk and heterodox cults, many of which bore affinities with tribal or pre-Vedic traditions. Jyotiriśvara's *Varṇa Ratnākara* refers to ascetics, *Kāpālikas*, and wandering mendicants, often viewed with suspicion by orthodox circles [32]. Practices of self-mortification and ritual poverty echo older Buddhist and Jain ascetic ideals lingering in the region.

Particularly significant was the worship of Manasā (the serpent goddess), which Vidyāpati describes in detail. Known locally as Viṣaharīkāpūjā, this cult was observed with grandeur comparable to Durgā Pūjā [33]. Sukumar Sen and Sushil Bhusan Dasgupta have demonstrated that the Manasā tradition reflected not only sectarian rivalry but also social conflict between settled agrarian communities and semi-nomadic groups, where the deities of each side embodied agricultural stability versus tribal mobility [34]. The continued celebration of Nāga Pañchamī in Mithilā, emphasizing health, fertility, and protection from snakebite, reveals the fusion of Śākta and Tantric traditions with agrarian ritual cycles [35].

Tantric Cult in Medieval Mithilā

Among the many religious currents of medieval Mithilā, Tantricism stands out as the most pervasive and socially integrative. Unlike sectarian movements that appealed to limited communities, Tantra cut across boundaries of caste, sect, and gender, embedding itself in both elite philosophical discourse and everyday ritual practices [36]. Its distinctiveness lay in its capacity to assimilate local deities, tribal cults, and folk rites into a larger Brahmanical framework, while simultaneously offering esoteric pathways

to salvation and worldly benefits.

Origins and Social Milieu

The emergence of Tantra in Mithilā must be situated in the context of large-scale land grants during the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, which facilitated Brahmanical settlement in tribal and rural areas [37]. This interaction between Brahmins and indigenous communities led to a cultural synthesis: Brahmins appropriated tribal deities and fertility cults, while local communities adopted Brahmanical ritual idioms. The result was the rise of Śākta-Śaiva Tantra, rooted in Mithilā's sacred geography and agrarian economy [38].

Tantric texts themselves emphasized the cult of the mother goddess, but significantly, goddesses such as Durgā, Tārā, and Kālī were not restricted to Śākta systems; their worship appeared equally in Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Buddhist, and even Jain Tantric adaptations [39]. This universality made Tantra not a sect but a religio-cultural mode, one that was deeply embedded in Mithilā's religious pluralism.

Philosophical and Ritual Dimensions

Philosophically, Tantra revolved around the non-dual union of Śiva and Śakti,nivṛtti (rest) and pravṛtti (activity), which symbolised the ultimate reality beyond dualism [40]. In Mithilā, this was reflected in Harihara devotion (the fusion of Viṣṇu and Śiva) and in Vidyāpati's philosophical musings on divine unity [41]. Popular texts also conveyed the same vision through symbolic language, with Tantric diagrams (*yantras*) and syllables (*varṇas*) often interpreted as cosmological realities [42].

Ritual life was equally elaborate. The pañcamakāras (five M's *matsya*, *māṁsa*, *madya*, *maithuna*, *mudrā*) became the most controversial markers of Tantric practice. However, while outsiders saw them as orgiastic, they often functioned symbolically, representing the transformation of sensual energies into spiritual realisation [43]. Beyond esoteric rites, Tantra offered a repertoire of practical rituals addressing day-to-day needs: healing, exorcism, fertility, protection from snakebite, and agricultural prosperity [44]. In this way, Tantric specialists served simultaneously as priests, healers, astrologers, and magicians within the villages of Mithilā.

Institutions and Literature

Mithilā was a notable centre of Tantric scholasticism. Writers such as Devāditya, Vardhamāna, Madana, and Gananatha produced influential treatises [45]. Devanātha's *Mantrakaumudī* and *Tantrakaumudī* systematised rituals, while Vidyāpati is credited with authoring the *Āgamādvaitanirṇaya* [46]. Similarly, Narasimha's *Tārābhaktisudhārṇava* provides evidence of goddess cults in Mithilā and their intertextual connections with Buddhist Tārā worship [47]. Such texts demonstrate that Mithilā was not merely a recipient of pan-Indian Tantra but an active producer of Tantric knowledge.

Ritual Practices and Sacred Geography

Tantric practices in Mithilā were embedded in both domestic and public ritual life. Household customs, such as the Gosāinī pūjā, the teaching of the first verse in praise of Śakti, Kumārī feeding (pātari ceremony), and the ritual diagrams (aripāna) linked to Tantric cakras, illustrate the penetration of Tantric symbolism into everyday life [48]. Festivals such as Vijayadaśamī, celebrated with initiatory undertones, further reinforced Tantric themes [49].

The sacred geography of Mithilā was equally marked by Tantric sites, including Ugratārā at Mahisi (Saharsa), Katyāyanī at Jayamangalā, Ucchaith Bhagavatī (Darbhanga), and Janakpur in Nepal, all of which were major Śāktapīṭhas [50]. Many of these shrines were earlier centres of Buddhist esotericism, later reconstituted as Śākta temples, reflecting the layered religious history of the region [51].

Popular cults of Jvālāmukhī, Caṇḍī, Tārā, Kālī, and Durgā continue to thrive in Mithilā, showing the persistence of Tantric Śāktism. Beyond temple worship, the deep social embedding of Śakti is visible in customary practices: household Gosāinī pūjā, initiation of children with hymns in praise of Śakti, ritual aripana designs associated with Tantric diagrams (*cakras*), the pātari ceremony of feeding Kumārīs, the symbolic use of pāga in Tantric rites, and the centrality of Vijayadaśamī as a festival of devotion and ritual *sādhanā* [52]. The *Likhnāvalī* of Vidyāpati itself prescribes ritual arrangements for Śiva and Śakti worship, showing the coexistence of scholastic and popular traditions [53].

Tantricism also profoundly shaped the cultural and aesthetic life of Mithilā. Local art forms such as aripana floor designs and kohabar paintings, often associated with fertility symbols, are integrally tied to Tantric yantras. Tantrics believed that deities descended into these geometric diagrams, which simultaneously symbolized cosmic principles and the female generative organ [54]. The principle of the *pañcamakāras* (wine, meat, fish, parched grain, and sexual union) encapsulated the Tantric idea that sense objects, usually viewed as sources of bondage, could be sublimated into means of liberation through ritualized transformation [55].

Two major streams of Tantric practice, Dakṣiṇācāra (the right-handed, more devotional and symbolic path) and Vāmācāra (the left-handed, esoteric and transgressive path), were both prevalent in Mithilā [56]. Vāmācāra in particular emphasized cakrapūjā, nocturnal rites in which male and female practitioners engaged in esoteric rituals involving Bhairavas, yoginīs, and betālas, as enumerated by Jyotiriśvara in the *Varṇaratnākara* [57]. These practices reflected Tantric egalitarianism, where traditional caste and gender hierarchies were suspended in the ritual space.

The influence of Tantra extended beyond religion into linguistic and philosophical domains. Maithil script (*Mithilākṣara*) was closely associated with Tantric symbolism, with letters themselves interpreted as yantras, triangles (*trikoṇa*), bindu, circles (*vṛtta*), and squares (*catuṣkoṇa*) [58]. Tantric scholars of Mithilā emphasized the power of Oṃ and Kuṇḍalinī, with even the first letter of the Maithili script being linked to the awakening of spiritual energy [59].

Thinkers such as Vidyāpati absorbed Tantric influence into their devotional and philosophical outlooks. His concept of Harihara (a fusion of Śiva and Viṣṇu) reflected not only sectarian reconciliation but also the Tantric notion of divine unity [60]. As Ananda Coomaraswamy noted, the Tantric and bhakti traditions often expressed the mystical union of the finite with the infinite through the language of erotic and conjugal love, a symbolism richly evident in Vidyāpati's poetry [61].

Everyday Tantra and Social Impact

Tantricism's strength lay in its integration with agrarian

society. The yantras and *aripanas* used in Mithilā's ritual art (such as *kohabar* paintings) were not only religious diagrams but also symbols of fertility and agricultural cycles [62]. The Tantric valorisation of female sexuality and fertility as cosmic forces found visual expression in these artistic traditions.

By institutionalising pūjā, promoting bhakti to both the guru and the deity, and offering rituals for worldly success (kāmyāni), Tantra became deeply popularised and secularised [63]. It appealed to elites as an esoteric philosophy and to commoners as a source of healing, protection, and prosperity.

The history of Tantra in Mithilā demonstrates that it was not an isolated esoteric movement but a comprehensive cultural system. By appropriating local cults, embedding itself in daily ritual, and producing sophisticated textual traditions, Tantricism became synonymous with religion in medieval Mithilā. It functioned simultaneously as a philosophical framework, ritual technology, and social practice, bridging the gap between elite scholasticism and folk religiosity. Its legacy persists even today in Mithilā's household rituals, festivals, and visual arts, underscoring the region's enduring identity as a heartland of Tantric culture.

Conclusion

The religious history of medieval Mithilā presents a striking example of how plural belief systems could interact, compete, and ultimately coalesce within a shared cultural landscape. Beginning with Vedic sacrificial orthodoxy, the region became a fertile ground for both resistance and innovation: the Upaniṣadic dialogues at Janaka's court reflect not only a challenge to priestly exclusivity but also the emergence of a spiritual rationalism rooted in Mithilā itself.

The arrival and flourishing of Jainism and Buddhism in early centuries underscored Mithilā's position as a crossroads of ascetic and philosophical traditions. Their legacies did not vanish with their institutional decline; instead, elements of their ascetic ethos and ritual practices were absorbed into later Brahmanical and Tantric frameworks. The hostility preserved in theological polemics coexisted with everyday interaction, where monks, mendicants, and householders often lived in practical amity.

By the medieval period, the cultural dominance of Śaiva, Śākta, and Vaiṣṇava devotion reshaped the religious terrain. However, this was not a simple story of orthodoxy's triumph. The devotional literature of Vidyāpati and his contemporaries reveals an emphasis on divine unity that transcends sectarian boundaries, even as it affirms diverse forms of worship. The very symbolism of the Maithila tilaka, combining Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Śākta marks,captures this fusion in embodied ritual form.

It was Tantricism, however, that provided the most enduring structure for religious synthesis. More than a sect, it functioned as a cultural grammar that accommodated domestic rites, agrarian festivals, esoteric practices, and scholastic elaborations. Through its valorisation of Śakti, incorporation of local deities, and ritual technologies aimed at worldly well-being, Tantra enabled Mithilā's people to integrate the cosmic and the quotidian, the esoteric and the popular, the elite and the folk.

What emerges from this complex tapestry is a distinctive regional religiosity, neither merely derivative of pan-Indian currents nor isolated in provincial tradition. Mithilā demonstrates how religious cultures evolve through layering and negotiation, where older cults are not obliterated but transformed, and where sectarian boundaries blur in the lived experience of devotees.

In this sense, the sacred pluralities of Mithilā anticipate broader dynamics of Indian religious history: the tension between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, the continual absorption of local cults into larger traditions, and the central role of ritual in mediating divine and social order. Far from being peripheral, Mithilā stands as a microcosm of Indian religiosity, a landscape where continuity and change, unity and diversity, Vedic and non-Vedic traditions all converge to produce a religious culture at once intensely local and profoundly universal.

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