

Revitalizing Mithila painting for sustainable development: A case study of indigenous communities in the Madhubani region, Bihar, India

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India's cultural diversity, evident in its rich history of art and crafts, is rooted in social and religious customs. Indigenous art-forms were created by people using natural resources, forming distinct identity. Aesthetics have influenced people's lives, evident in their surroundings and cultural expression. Mithila painting of Mithila region is a sustainable development model driven by women, preserving cultural heritage, and attracting economic participation. However, preserving the cultural essence of Madhubani art amid socio-economic changes poses challenges due to reduced patronage, lack of innovation, and commercialization, while balancing tradition with modern demands. While marketing and tourism support sustain the art-form, rapid modernization in India's rural population threatens traditional crafts and knowledge. The objectives of this research are to investigate Mithila Paintings as Bihar's heritage art-form and analyze the impact of commercialization, examine the living conditions of artisans in Mithila Region, and explore the impact on Mithila painting due to globalization and changing consumer demands. This research was carried out through literature review, field visit and questionnaire survey. The research highlights the importance of safeguarding and restoring lost knowledge for societal sustainability and economic development, emphasizes the importance of enhancing artisans' skills and promoting the art-form, and to promote the villages of Madhubani District as a tourist destination. It further highlights the need to transform the physical environment of the villages through sustainable economic development and incorporating tradition with aesthetics.

Keywords: Art-form, Mithila painting, Madhubani region, Revitalization, Sustainable development

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Mahatma Gandhi's famous statement, "India's soul resides in its villages," is embodied by Indian communities through their broad range of globally recognized art-forms, exemplified in the villages. Communities have established themselves in areas favorable to these art-forms based on geographic location, climatic conditions, natural resources, and accessibility. Vernacular settlements-maintained crafts-based customs reflect their essential occupation and work aesthetics, giving them a distinct character¹. In India, stories are narrated in form of crafts with materials frozen in time, reflecting the culture of the society creating and nurturing it, as a reflection of the community's response, which shapes the evolution of the art-form. Surface ornamentation and decorative themes are manifestations of religion and social customs. Being the birthplace of numerous civilizations, some of which are widespread throughout the country, crafts have contributed to their diverse aesthetics.

As time passed, patterns have changed and they have been passed on to succeeding generations. Art-forms continue to be a path for personal growth and the creation of long-term jobs. According to Ranjan and Ranjan (2007)², traditional crafts are sustainable practices that require careful consideration, offering scope for revenue generation from within the community.

Folk art, derived from settlers' surroundings and recollections, is easily incorporated into everyday products and surfaces, enhancing the lives of villagers. It is important to refer to skilled artists as they allow creativity to flow, often with societal messages³. Rural hut-art is influenced by interconnected visual design components, extending to surrounding areas and environment. This continued to be the main identity of these villages, which developed over generations to become their legacy. According to Javanovic-Popovic *et al.*⁴, the intentional beauty of the artefacts in traditional villages is what gives them their aesthetic appeal.

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Mithila painting/art, also known as Madhubani painting/art of Mithila region led by women, combines traditional methods with contemporary themes, which promotes sustainable economic growth and cultural preservation. Its influence expanded through marketing, packaging, and tourism, demonstrating self-sufficiency and cultural preservation.

However, reduced patronage, declining interest of artisans and the younger generation, and lack of innovation, threatens traditional crafts and knowledge as youth are drawn into the global lifestyles brought about by rapid modernization and globalization brought about by technology⁴. Over-commercialization, lack of opportunities, and inadequate support systems has led to the dilution of cultural heritage in various art disciplines. Mass production techniques, unequal pay, and a lack of conservation efforts are contributing to an unsustainable expansion of these disciplines, threatening economic development and knowledge preservation. There is, therefore, a need to revitalize Mithila art.

This brings us to the following research questions: What are the causes of decline of Mithila art-form? How can Mithila art be revitalized to meet contemporary demands while maintaining its heritage? How does commercialization impact Mithila art and artisans?

The objectives of this research are to investigate Mithila Paintings as Bihar's heritage art-form and analyze difficulties from commercialization, examine the deterioration of living conditions of artisans in Mithila Region, and explore the decline of Mithila paintings due to globalization and changing consumer demands.

Materials and Methods

The research was carried out through literature review, field visits and questionnaire survey (Fig. 1).

An online research methodology was employed, which involved perusing multiple websites, digital libraries, published research papers and books on Indian art-forms. The data served as the foundation for this investigation in documenting how the vernacular aesthetics of Mithila art-form and the villages fostering it, have changed over time. The selected database for data collection was Google Scholar.

PRISMA framework was applied for identifying documents; search terms, such as "Art-form," "Madhubani," "Revitalization," "Aesthetics," "Sustainability," and other relevant combinations were used. The time-frame for the search was 1981-2024. Inclusion criteria were limited to Madhubani District. The language chosen was English. The result was a comprehensive database of 120 documents, to which subjective criteria of title and abstract-based exclusion were applied. Finally, 20 papers (Table 1) were found relevant for full text analysis, out of which, three have been removed due to predatory nature of the journals (Fig. 2).

Selection criteria for villages chosen for field visit were based on the number of Padmashree and national awardees from a village who have made Madhubani art famous throughout the world. A semi-structured questionnaire was designed specifically for the artists of the villages identified, which include Jitwarpur (22 houses), Ranti (20 houses), Ghiwahi (5 houses), Harinagar (1house) and Rashidpur (7 houses).

Study area

In 1972, reorganization of the districts of Bihar resulted in the division of erstwhile Darbhanga District with its northern subdivision forming Madhubani District (Fig. 3), occupying an area of 3,501 square kilometers, and comprising 21 community development blocks and 5 subdivisions; Mithila art still prevalent in their villages. Madhubani District is bordered by Nepal in the north, Darbhanga District in the south, Sitamarhi District in the west, and Supaul District in the east.

Results

Literature review

Altogether 20 papers have been reviewed. Their objectives, important findings, research gaps identified, suggestions for future works and other details are given in Table 1.

Mithila paintings as Bihar's heritage art-form

Mithila painting is the most cherished traditional art-form of Bihar. This traditional culture experienced a range of shifts over time as it adjusted to several changes (Fig. 4). Mithila art-form is the result of all



Fig. 1 — Methodological framework employed

the variables that contributed to it, including the sociocultural environment, the area with its climate and resources, and the skill-sets passed down through generations², which make it visible as an artistic heritage of Bihar. An art-form is impacted by

location, climatic factor, and raw materials identified by its social, cultural and religious environment and creative, hands-on as well as acquired skill. The well-made items represent the desires and requirements of the society⁵.

Table 1 — Literature reviewed

S. No.	Title	Author	Year	Journal/publisher	Place/location of study	Objectives	Main findings	Research gap identified	Suggestion for future work
1.	Mithila Women in the Past and Present: A Journey of Resilience and Transformation	Bibha Kumari Jha	2024	Patan Prospective Journal	Mithila region (India & Nepal)	Trace women's journey: tradition Madhubani education, governance	Custodians of culture; art-fosters agency; geography education supports participation	No field data; art-centric; wide without nuance	Interviews/surveys; livelihood data; sectoral expansion; subregional study
2.	Splendid Kaudi Art – A Sustainable Enterprise for Empowerment of Rural Women	Sannapamma K J, D S Bhairappanavar, V V Sangannavar & S Mariyappanavar	2023	Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge	Northern Karnataka, India (rural communities)	Revive Kaudi art via design, training and micro-enterprise for women's empowerment	<i>Kaudi</i> textiles (e.g. yoga mats) are market-ready, value addition succeeded, enterprise potential highlighted	Lacks long-term income data, comparative ecological/cultural sustainability analysis	Longitudinal tracking; comparative craft studies; market strategies; sustainability audits; cooperative models
3.	Pragmatic Connotations of Mithila Arts	Y. P. Sharma & L. Campus	2022	Xavier International College Journal (XICJ)	Mithila region, Bihar	Analyze pragmatic meanings in Mithila art	Functional aesthetics; persistent symbolism; adaptation to contemporary contexts	Likely lacks empirical, quantitative, and transmission-based data	Ethnography, motif usage analysis, intergenerational transmission, design integration
4.	A review on journey of Madhubani painting till date	Sunita Rai; Ekta Grover; Nargis Fatima	2022	International Journal of Textile and fashion technology (IJTFT)	Madhubani, Bihar	Trace evolution; highlight social/cultural & economic significance	3000-year history; women practitioners; media transition; NGO support	Lacks empirical, technical, symbolic, stylistic depth	Surveys, material studies, caste/style mapping, longitudinal research, digital/institutional assessment
5.	Mithila art: An analysis of various styles and symbolic values of Madhubani Painting	Suraj Prasad & Anjan Sen	2021	International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies	Mithila region, Bihar; micro-regional context	Analyze styles, symbolism, and socio-cultural aspects of Madhubani art	Five styles; rich symbolism; gender/caste roles; spatial variation	Lack of formal analysis; no livelihood data; limited transmission insights	Formal aesthetics; economic/ethnographic study; transmission; comparative & policy-oriented research
6.	A Magnificent Form of Indian Folk Art: Warli, Madhubani, And Pattachitra	Nikumbh, Sarkar & Bisht	2021	Elementary Education Online	Maharashtra (Warli), Bihar (Madhubani), Odisha (Pattachitra)	Compare creation, origins, status, cultural and market value of three folk arts	Distinct local traditions; organic techniques; growing global appeal	Lacks empirical data, comparative study, artisan voices	Field surveys, inter-tradition analysis, artisan interviews, market policy studies
7.	Madhubani Paintings: People's Living Cultural Heritage	Chandra Shamsher Bahadur Singh	2020	World History Encyclopedia	Mithila region, Bihar, India	Present Madhubani as living cultural heritage; outline its symbolism, evolution, gender role	Ritual roots, natural pigments, media evolution, women's cultural agency	Lacks ethnographic data, economic/market analysis, longitudinal perspective	Ethnographic fieldwork, economic/market studies, longitudinal and gender-focused research

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Table 1 — Literature reviewed (Contd.)

S. No.	Title	Author	Year	Journal/publisher	Place/location of study	Objectives	Main findings	Research gap identified	Suggestion for future work
8.	The Madhubani Metamorphosis: The Intersection of Art, Ritual and Gender Roles	A. Ashraf & S. Jha	2020	International Journal of Culture History	Mithila region, Bihar	Analyze how art, ritual, and gender roles intersect in Madhubani's evolution	Art remains ritual-linked; women are central; commercialization has shifted contexts	Lacks ritual specificity; no empirical data; limited gender-dynamics study	Ethnography, gender-role shifts, motif-ritual mapping, longitudinal research
9.	Locating Madhubani Painting in the Context of Cultural Tourism and Place Identity of Mithila Region	Handra Shamsher Singh, Nishant Nishat & Shyju P. J.	2020	Atna Journal of Tourism Studies	Mithilanchal region, Bihar	Examine role of Madhubani in cultural tourism and place-making	Art strengthens identity, supports tourism, but risks commodification	Lacks quantitative, artisan, and policy-level input	Tourism economics, artisan views, interpretive planning, heritage sustainability
10.	Sustainable Transformation of a Vernacular Habitat through the Revival of Crafts: Naya Village in West Bengal, India.	Jayati Mukherjee, Mainak Ghosh	2019	Journal of the International Society for the Study of Vernacular Settlements (ISSVS e-journal)	Naya village, Pingla, South West Bengal, India	Understand craft-based transformation via Pata Chitra revival	Craft revival boosted economy, culture, identity; UNESCO support was key	Lacks environmental focus; needs policy integration	Study ecological sustainability, policy frameworks, scalability
11.	Traditional Crafts as Materials in Placemaking: Application and Sustainability in Aesthetic Transformation of Geometry of Urban Public Spaces	Jayati Mukherjee; Mainak Ghosh	2019	Journal of the International Society for the Study of Vernacular Settlements (ISSVS e-journal)	Urban public spaces (general application)	Explore use of crafts in placemaking and aesthetic urban transformation	Crafts enrich urban geometry, identity; offer aesthetic-functional synergy	Need for empirical trials; durability data; social/community analysis	Field pilots; material testing; participatory models; design guidelines
12.	Madhubani: A traditional Art-form from walls to Apparels	Kavita Patil	2018	IOSR-JHSS	Ranti village, Madhubani District, Bihar	Trace the transformation of Madhubani art from walls/floors to apparel	Ritual origins; digitization to textiles; women's economic engagement	Limited technical, economic, cultural analysis	Technical documentation; livelihoods study; cultural-social inquiry; design research
13.	"Cultural Mapping of India" – IGNC, 2014	Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), with support from UNESCO	2014	IGNCA, Janpath, New Delhi (under UNESCO Programme on Cultural Industries and Copyright Policies and Partnerships)	Pan-India (all States and UTs); data collected from field surveys, archives, and expert consultations across regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and map India's diverse cultural industries • Create a national cultural inventory • Recommend policy for preservation and empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created the first comprehensive Cultural Map of India • Highlighted decline of intangible heritage • Stressed need for IP protection and community support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Static data- not real-time • No interactive GIS platform • Lack of economic metrics and longitudinal tracking • Poor integration with IP frameworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop dynamic GIS-based, publicly accessible database • Link data with income, gender, and sustainability metrics • Align with national GI/IP policy • Train communities in digital tools and cooperative marketing

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Table 1 — Literature reviewed (Contd.)

S. No.	Title	Author	Year	Journal/publisher	Place/location of study	Objectives	Main findings	Research gap identified	Suggestion for future work
14.	Aesthetics of Vernacular Architecture Comparative analyses of context aesthetics in Balkan region	Jovanovic-Popovic, Sunjkic&Tomovska	2012	28th PLEA International Conference, Lima	Lowland Vojvodina (Serbia) & Highland Ohrid (Balkan region)	Comparative aesthetic analysis of vernacular architecture using contemporary environmental lens	Vernacular forms reflect contextual logic; strong harmony with environment; universal aesthetic principles	Need for empirical, cultural, and applied frameworks	Include experiential studies, cultural ethnography, climate-based design guidelines
15.	Crafts Atlas of India	Jaya Jaitly (Dastkari Haat Samiti)	2012	Niyogi Books (Simon & Schuster distribution)		Visually and academically document India's craft heritage	Comprehensive geographical organization; rich visuals; researcher utility	Limited socio-economic/ecological analysis; dynamic tracking missing	Economic/ecological studies; digital mapping; policy & education linkage
16.	From Folk Art to Fine Art: Changing Paradigms in the Historiography of Mithil Painting	Rekha Neel	2010	<i>Journal of Art Historiography, Dept. of Art History, Univ. of Birmingham</i>	Mithila region	Trace historiographical shift from folk to fine art framing	Archer's caste lens; marginalized voices; rise of Harijan narratives; Western scholar influence	Women's roles overlooked; lack of regional, intersectional art histories	Gendered and regional historiography; intersectional analysis; critique of colonial interpretations
17.	Mithila Paintings: Past, Present and Future	Kailash K. Mishra	2016	Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA)	Mithila region (e.g., Jitwarpur), Bihar	Chronicle evolution; highlight women's art as parallel literacy	Ritual roots; medium shifts; women's agency; commercialization risks	No quantitative data; lack of ethnography; limited market analysis	Livelihood/economic surveys; field ethnography; value chain research; cultural preservation; longitudinal impact studies
18.	Handmade in India: Crafts of India	M. P. Ranjan, Aditi Ranjan	2007	Council of Handicraft Development Corporations; US Mapin; edition Abbeville Press	Entire India (state/district-level fieldwork)	Document & preserve India's geographical craft diversity	Extensive visual and geographic documentation; rich reference tools	Limited ecological, market, digital, and policy analysis	Sustainability, digital tools, policy integration, impact evaluation
19.	Documenting the Image in Mithila Art	Carolyn Brown Heinz	2006	<i>Visual Anthropology Review</i> (Society for Visual Anthropology, AAA)	Mithila region, North Bihar, India	Critique documentation biases; recover archival wall-paintings; assess commercialization role	Widespread wall tradition; archival recovery; imperial-economy link to paper art	Missing ethnography, technique/material analysis, longitudinal cultural evolution	Field ethnography, material study, diachronic comparison, community-led archiving
20.	Madhubani Painting	Upendra Thakur	1981	Abhinav Publications, New Delhi	Mithila region (Bihar)	Document ritual-folk art traditions via descriptive and textual commentary	Ritual symbolism, strong female agency, codification in Sanskrit literature	Lacks socio-economic insight, technical detail, and change over time	Livelihood studies; pigment/technique analysis; temporal/commercial evolution; ethnographic documentation

Origins and cultural significance of Madhubani painting

Mithila painting is a common domestic practice in the Nepalese lowlands and northernmost parts of Bihar or Mithila region. This tradition of depicting

distinctive cultural elements of Mithilanchal is supposed to have existed since the *Ramayana* period, when King Janak commissioned artisans to create paintings for the wedding of Sita, his daughter.

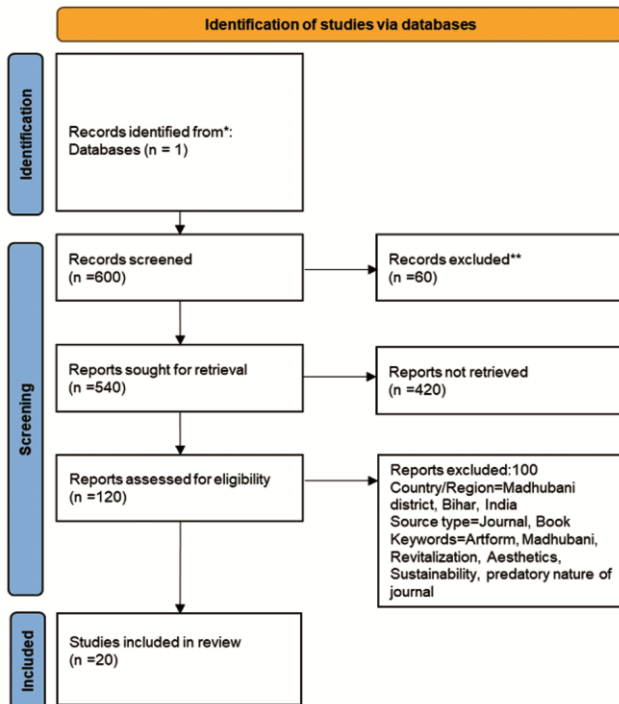


Fig. 2 — PRISMA framework for identification of documents

It is believed that the Madhuban Forest is where Rama and Sita first laid eyes on one another. Madhubani is derived from *Madhu-Van* (forest of honey)⁶. As per epic *Ramayana*, Urmila – Laksmana’s wife – created his image on a wall, which she worshipped when he went to the forest with his elder brother Rama and his wife Sita when Rama was banished⁷.

This ancient art-form rediscovered by William Archer, a British officer, after a major earthquake in north Bihar in 1934, gained major international prominence in the 20th century, when he claimed that the art-work on the crumbling walls of houses demolished by the earthquake were likened to those by contemporary artists such as Picasso and Mira. He captured these paintings on black and white film, which is thought to be the earliest known image of a Madhubani painting⁸.

Pupul Jayakar cites research by Rekha Neal when she states that the discovery of Madhubani paintings occurred when the paintings of local women from Rashidpur, Lahariyaganj, Harinagar and other villages were moved from walls to paper, causing the middle-class to embrace it with considerable rapidity. Pupul

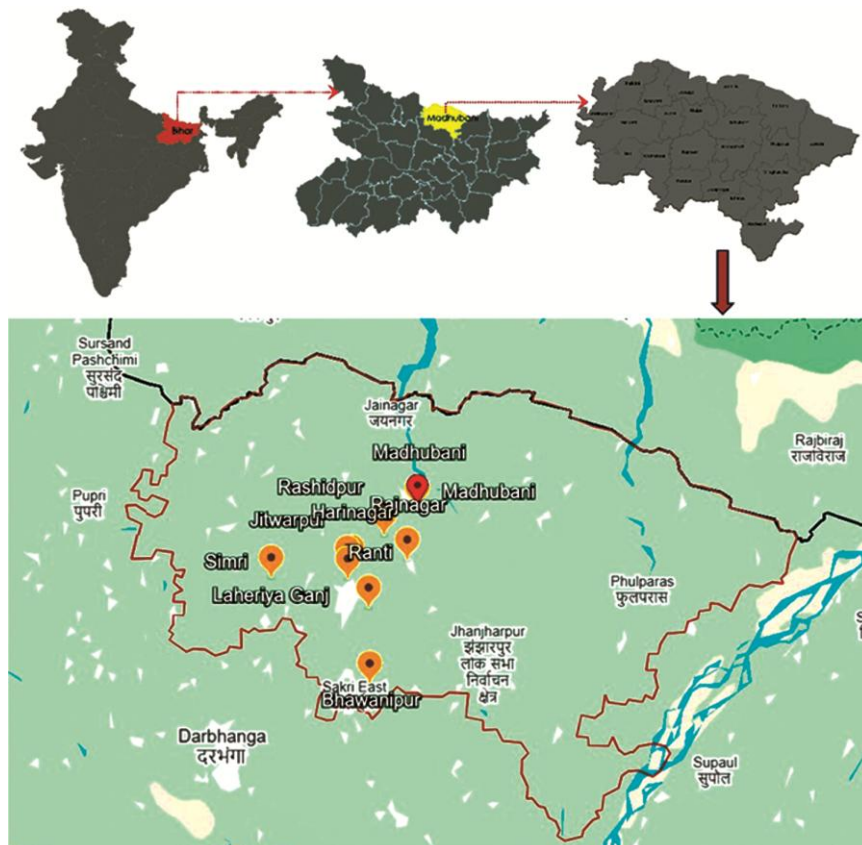


Fig. 3 — Location of Madhubani District including villages involved in Mithila painting, (Source: adapted from Google Earth)

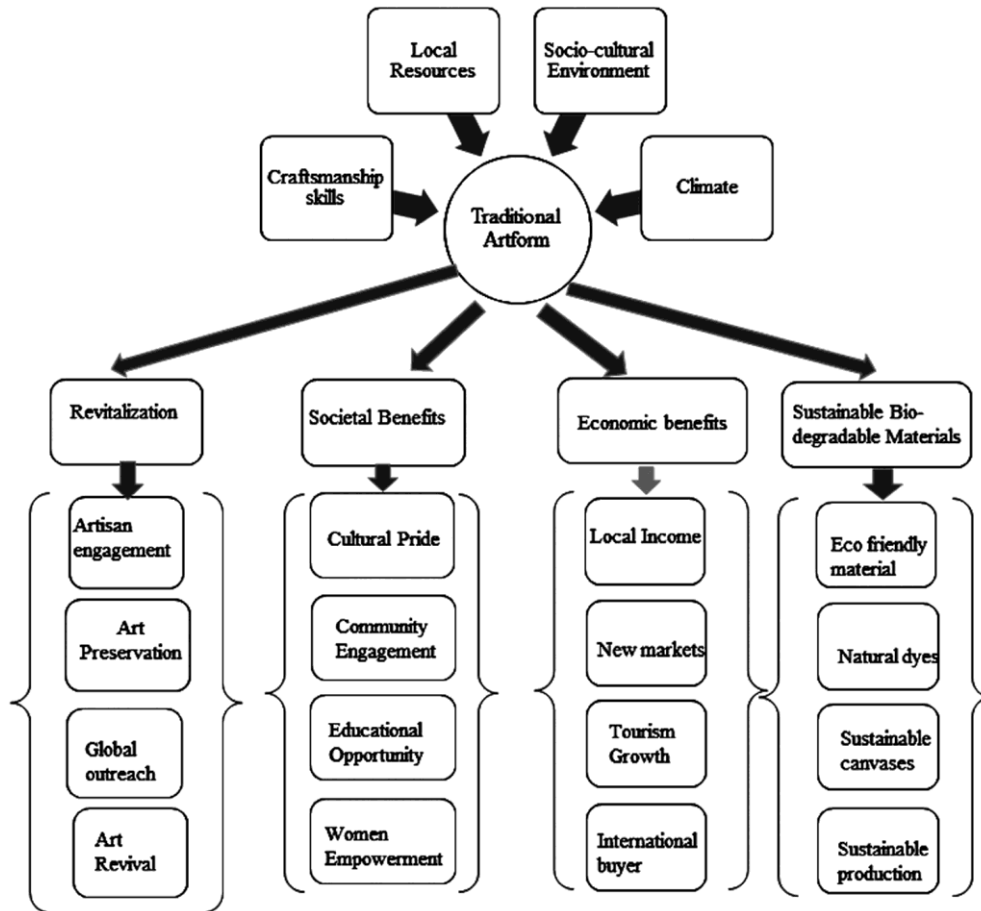


Fig. 4 — Traditional art-form (Adapted from: Mukherjee & Ghosh 2019)

Jayakar sent Mr. Bhaskar Kulkarni to Mithila in 1966-1968 to revive Bihar's economy by encouraging local women to create the mural paintings on paper and fabric, aiming to increase revenue, ease of sale, and ensure their existence by selling their handicrafts for a profit. This resulted in improving women's employment and economic status of those engaged, and associating art with a sense of identity.

However, it was Sri Lalit Narayan Mishra's efforts that gave this art-form a boost in 1967-1968⁹. While initially done on walls made of mud, the art has considerably transformed with the use of paper, canvas, fabric, etc.

Styles of Madhubani paintings

This art-form is among the most well-known in the entire globe and highly appreciated by art enthusiasts due to its distinctive style of finger and tweak drawing, natural colour palette, and subjects that are related to social life, religion, nature, love, and fraternity. Mithila art serves as a repository for

knowledge and is regarded as Mithila's rich cultural heritage and a living tradition at present.

Traditional Madhubani painting is done in four main styles: *Kohbar*, *Kachni*, *Bharni*, *Godhana* and *Tantrik*, which was once caste based, as only Brahmin women could create the figurines of Hindu gods and goddesses. Additionally, the *Dusadh* community's ladies used to make only *Godhana* style. Although *Sonars*, *Ahirs*, and *Dusadhs* also engage in this art, only a few houses participated initially. However, things have changed in the present era, and any group can create any Madhubani art style. It is also not tied to any caste¹⁰.

The walls of three locations in Mithila households comprise wall paintings – *Ghosain-ka-ghar* (family deity's room), *Kohbar ghar* (nuptial chamber) (Fig. 5a) and *Kohbar ghar ka koniyan* (*verandah*) outside the nuptial chamber (Fig. 5b & Fig. 5c). Most of the paintings in *Kohbar ghar* depict mythological tales and legends and are created using *gairika* (red mineral pigment)⁹.

Classification of Madhubani folk-art

Upendra Thakur (1981) has classified Madhubani folk-art into following categories based on application⁹.

1. *Aripana* /*Aipan*: Floor Drawings (Fig. 6a)
2. *Bhitti-Chitra*: Wall Paintings/Mural painting (Fig. 6b)
3. Terracotta figurines and dolls of other materials (Fig. 6c)
4. Artistic Utility articles in colourful form (Fig. 6d)

Painting techniques: A love-based art

Wall surfaces are either plastered with cow dung or white-washed before painting. *Gulabi* (pink), *nila* (blue), *sindura* (saffron), and *sugapankhi* (green) are the colours utilized; colours made from natural sources. Burnt barley seeds are used to make black, turmeric or lime juice combined with milk from banyan leaves to make yellow, *kusuma* flower juice to make red, and *bel* leaves to make green. The Kayastha families' paintings feature hues like brown,



Fig. 5 — Madhubani Paintings by artist Godavari Dutt (a) *Kohbar* painting (b) Lord Ganesha (c) Ram Sita



Fig. 6 — (a) *Aripana*, (b) *Bhitti-Chitra*, (c) Terracotta dolls, (d) & (e) Utility articles

yellow-ochre, turmeric, *harada*, red madder, black and other colors blended with goat's milk⁹.

Rice powder, water, soot, gum, cow dung, *palel* bark, *sikkar* berries, *gulmohar* sepals, Siam creeper berries, clay, and pollen are also used to create various hues, including white, black, light brown, pink, blue, parrot green, dark green, red, and yellow.

Madhubani paintings, primarily red, are created by women using bamboo twigs and fabric, a tradition shared across villages, with idioms remaining consistent⁹.

Paintings' theme

Madhubani paintings, a distinctive style of Indian folk-art, symbolize peace, love, and longing with themes depicting stories in several panels placed in series. Apart from aesthetics, they provide visual education. Mithila painting is primarily associated with ancient epics and portray humanity and its relationship to nature and divine as well as country's cultural legacy and social structure, which also focus on fertility, love, and religion^{11,12}. The walls of the homes in villages of Madhubani District, particularly at Jitwarpur, Ranti and villages of Darbhanga, Saharsa, Purnia and other districts display these themes. Other themes include vermillion-painted *Harisaunapiya ka chitra*, depicting lives of two females, and *Ghosain ghar ka chitra*. The four corners of the bridal chamber are painted with images of *Nayana yoginis* holding objects on their heads.

The family-friendly *Sarovara chitra* pool features fish, turtles, and other aquatic life. Social gatherings like weddings frequently feature depictions of sacred plants like *tulsi* and natural elements like the sun and moon. Every available space in a Madhubani painting is packed with images of flora, fauna and geometric patterns¹⁰.

Goddess Durga is the favourite for *Kayasths* and *Brahmins*. Goddess Kali is painted in *Tantrik* ceremonies; *Tantra* is important in creating wall paintings and *Aripana*. Paintings are created to sanctify and beautify doorways and courtyard. *Kohbar* paintings are made during weddings. Palanquin, turtle, fish, moon, flowers, sun, and *Kadamba* trees are also depicted. On important occasions, wall murals known as *bhitti-chitra* are created.

Symbols have distinct meaning. Palanquin and elephant signify nobility, sun and moon symbolize longevity, while geese and peacock symbolize well-being and serenity⁹. Bamboo represents masculine gender and fertility, whereas lotus represents good fortune and feminine gender.

For *upanayana*, sun, moon, as well as gods and goddesses are portrayed. During weddings, various symbols such as the sun, moon, bamboo, lotuses, parrots, and fishes are used¹³. Turtles represent connection of lovers and water, while parrots represent lovebirds. Fishes represent fecundity. Sun and moon stand for attributes that sustain life¹⁴.

Brahmin paintings feature abstract human shapes, vibrant colors, and *Bhagavata Purana* motifs. They depict scenes from Lord Krishna's life, fishes, turtles, elephants, tigers, and floral designs. *Dalit* paintings, incorporating themes from legends of their heroes, can be seen as self-aggrandizement.

Paintings on paper, ceramics, fans, and pots use animals to represent vitality, personality, genders, and togetherness. *Kohbar* rendition of Madhubani art is considered authentic, despite commercialization undermining customs. It is depicted in various forms, including public spaces, saris, t-shirts, bags, home décor, and clothing.

Impact of commercialization

Changing into a fine art: Originality and tradition

Madhubani Painting – a traditional art-form that evolved from household *aripana* to murals using brushes, cotton swabs and hands became more elaborate with lining, and motifs becoming permanent and transportable. Paintings were traditionally created and then recreated. They weren't intended to endure forever. Artists have noticed that intricate and precise pieces in Madhubani Painting lose spontaneity and essence, leading to a renewed desire to return to the fundamentals, regardless of subject, style, or media, as they become more commercialized¹⁵.

Mithila paintings, inspired by social themes of the present are evolving over time and are becoming globally recognized. A blend of American and Indian styles in Madhubani artwork is gaining popularity. Late Mahasundari Devi moved from Madhubani artwork in private residences to handmade paper for marketability, used by SBI for debit cards¹⁶. Traditional art is being promoted by embracing new concepts and methods with passage of time. A significant and ongoing endeavour has been undertaken to have a worldwide audience for Madhubani paintings, which are highly valued globally, leading artists to experiment with other formats and are attracting fashion designers. The journey of Madhubani paintings has successfully navigated industry obstacles and mud barriers, showcasing its resilience and success¹⁶.

Living conditions of artisans in Mithila region

Support from various agencies allowing artists to focus on their craft helped create designs through commissions or market assistance. It took place throughout decades, through different agencies, in different methods, and at different times. Support like these helped Mithila art become more sustainable again and led to its diversification, which increased revenue. Subsequently, immediate environments and homes, and living conditions improved as a result of the economic expansion. As rural communities become more cohesive, household economic advancements result in better environments¹⁷.

The empowerment of women in Mithila region

Mithila painting is a unique female-created art-form in a culture dominated by men, since its inception. Being transient in nature—created and then quickly destroyed—there was no chance to preserve this early art. However, it endured for generations as an intangible heritage as it was an essential component of the culture of Mithila region, passed down through knowledge sharing from-mother-to-daughter¹¹. When a girl marries, the drawings are given to her on paper so that fresh designs are utilized in her new house.

Mithila painting, with a significant contribution to women's emancipation, celebrated both domestically and internationally has tremendously improved women's financial circumstances¹⁶. According to President APJ Abdul Kalam "a good nation cannot be created until women are empowered; when women are empowered, a stable society is guaranteed"¹².

The President of India recognized this folk-art by bestowing national awards and Padmashree to well-known artists; most of them being women. Since 1970 several women were honored with these awards, including Jagadamba Devi (national award-1970/Padmashree-1975), Sita Devi (1975/1981), Gang Devi (1976/1984), Godawari Dutta (1980), Mahasundari Devi (1982/2011), Baua Devi (1984/2017), and Godavari Dutta (Padmashree-2019) for their achievements. These women and other artists like Yamuna Devi, Shanti Devi, Chano Devi, and many more have contributed significantly in getting global recognition to Mithila painting. They are considered role models for women's empowerment bringing honors and recognition to the region despite their lack of education. Manisha Jha, a 2014 National Award recipient and a Bihar native and American residing in America, was exposed to Mithila painting

at a young age¹⁶; she has significantly contributed to the promotion of Madhubani art due to globalization of culture, media, and fashion.

Cherished worldwide, Madhubani art gained prominence as a way for women to earn a living while at home; a fantastic illustration of women's empowerment and motivation¹⁸.

Economic self-sufficiency and self-reinvention in Mithila through painting

The Mithila region achieved economic self-sufficiency and self-reinvention through Madhubani ancestry, identifying growth markers which contribute to socioeconomic growth and community identity. This was done by reviving its traditional Madhubani art, initially led by women. This art-form attracted male participation and modern societal themes, ensuring commercial viability. Supported by marketing, packaging, and tourism promotion, sales and revenue increased.

Field visit revealed Madhubani paintings on the facades of some houses in Jitwarpur and Ranti. Others, especially those of Padmashree/national awardees have paintings inside their homes. Such vibrant painted facades of houses in the region have potential to attract tourists, preserving cultural heritage and opening new business opportunities¹⁷.

Mithila art has been recreated and attained self-sufficiency through revival, adaptation, and commercialization¹⁶ (Fig. 7).

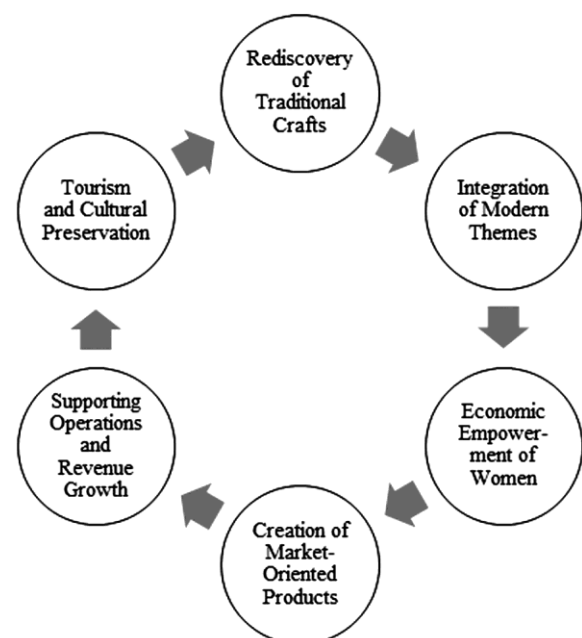


Fig. 7 — Process of economic self-sufficiency and self-reinvention

Impact of globalization and changing consumer demands

Madhubani painting as vernacular aesthetics in various spaces today

Madhubani art-form, which has its roots in ancient aesthetics, is still done in the houses on various occasions such as weddings, etc. these paintings are prominently used to decorate contemporary settings. Fashion industry, textiles, urban areas, facades of buildings and compound walls as well as interiors of residences, museums, all feature its elaborate designs and natural themes (Fig. 8). Madhubani art enhances interior spaces in both urban and rural areas by fusing classic artistry with modern design and encouraging environmentally responsible and sustainable crafting.

Globalization and future of the art

In 1962 CE, a foreign artist brought Madhubani murals back to India, resulting in their commercial success and introducing diverse painting techniques. Travelers with a passion for art started to show tremendous interest in India's traditional history and rural tourism, and Madhubani painting reached new heights outside Mithila. Compared to India, Madhubani artwork has become far more well-known outside, particularly in nations like Japan, Germany, France, and America¹⁷.

The Mithila Museum in Tokamachi, Niigata Prefecture, Japan houses over 1,000 Madhubani paintings by artists from India and abroad. The Master Craftsman Association of Mithila founded at Jitwarpur supports Madhubani artisans, with Madhubani artwork on various government structures and several trains in India¹⁹.

Challenges of revitalization of Mithila painting

While Indian government and social organizations promote this art through training programs and social initiatives, that stand out for a unique combination of rituals, creativity and community engagement. However, there are several challenges to preserve the cultural essence of Madhubani art.

Prevailing socio-economic changes poses challenges due to reduced patronage, lack of innovation, and commercialization, while balancing tradition with modern demands. While marketing and tourism support sustain the art-form, rapid modernization in India's rural population threatens traditional crafts and knowledge, particularly because India's rural population, especially youth, is embracing global lifestyles with rapid modernization of technology. As a result, traditional crafts are losing their significance, necessitating immediate action to preserve and restore knowledge for sustainable economic development.



Fig. 8 — (a) Hanuman temple at Ranti, Madhubani, (b) Vidyapati Bhawan, Patna (c) Madhubani paintings on boundary walls, Patna (d) CPWD guest house, Patna

Discussion

Madhubani painting represents Bihar's vibrant cultural heritage, passed down through generations and continuously evolving while retaining its unique identity, improving the conditions of women in the region apart from recognition gained for its artists²⁰. However, there are significant challenges in preservation and revitalization of this symbol of cultural history of Mithila region.

The vibrant paintings displayed in the folk-art villages like Jitwarpur in Madhubani region have potential to draw tourists and strengthen the local economy. While maintaining vernacular charm, cultural history must be incorporated into modern business.

Fostering community pride, creating fair market practices, ensuring fair trade practices to support the artists and their communities, while also highlighting the cultural significance of the art to attract sustainable tourism, can further empower artists and preserve this cultural heritage.

Madhubani-art's revitalization and its impact on settlement

Government, NGO, and sponsors are supporting Madhubani art revitalization, expanding market reach, creating diverse styles, and boosting artists' income through increasing sales. The craftspeople' general well-being is facilitated by improved living conditions brought about by this economic improvement. The market for tourism and the creation of crafts interconnected, with tourism serving as a major force behind community transformation. This change

promotes the revival of vernacular aesthetics and improves marketing and publicity, which in turn promotes more production and increased involvement in the craft. This ensures the survival of the habitat by supporting more activities and maintaining traditional aesthetics².

Field visit revealed Madhubani paintings on the facades of some houses in Jitwarpur and Ranti, where faded paints of Mithila paintings present a worn-out appearance. Others, especially those of Padma Shri/national awardees have paintings on walls inside their homes, which may create a cheerful ambience inside the house but may not attract tourists because of their lack of visibility to tourists, despite having potential to attract tourists.

In sharp contrast, some of the villages in Odisha, where *Pattachitra* art is done for commercial purposes, and front facades of most of the rural homes are painted to showcase this traditional Odishan art (Fig. 9). Exterior paintings of Orissa have revitalized traditional aesthetics, attracts tourists, preserves heritage, boosts livelihoods, enhances village visual appeal, encourages rural tourism, and promotes indigenous craftsmanship. Such type of practice of painting external walls of each and every house is required in Jitwarpur and other villages of Madhubani District famous for Mithila paintings.

Vibrant painted facades of houses in Mithila region have potential to attract tourists, preserve cultural heritage and opening new business opportunities¹⁷.



Fig. 9 — *Pattachitra* folk-art on homes in villages of Orissa (Picture credit – Dr. Anushri Barman)

Madhubani art form as a catalyst for sustainable development in Mithila

With its roots in Mithila cultural traditions, Madhubani art encourages environment sustainability and economic empowerment, particularly for rural women. Following sustainable goals are achieved through this art form:

- SDG1: No Poverty - Traditional art and crafts provide income and livelihoods, reducing poverty and promoting economic inclusion.
- SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth - The artisan sector, often rooted in traditional art, contributes to local economies, promoting sustainable cultural tourism and fosters entrepreneurship.
- SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities - Traditional art and crafts can be integrated into urban environments community-based initiatives, promoting cultural heritage and identity.
- SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production - Traditional art uses natural, biodegradable local materials, handcrafted techniques passed-on through generations, and energy-efficient practices promoting sustainable consumption and waste reduction.
- SDG 13: Climate Action - Traditional art depicts nature, raising awareness about climate change and sustainable practices.
- SDG 15: Life on Land- Traditional art protects biodiversity and ecosystem, contributing to natural resource conservation

Conclusion

Rural communities in the Mithila region showcase unique architecture and cultural heritage through paintings which are essential parts of their houses, reflecting the demands of practitioners and their occupations. The Madhubani paintings in Bihar showcase unique motifs and patterns, making them popular tourist destinations. The Mithila region has demonstrated that settlements can be restored to their natural habitats through systematic intervention, financial support, and government-led initiatives. The recovery of these villages takes two to three decades, with market activities, product diversification, and training implemented. This revitalization sustains development, transforming communities into craft hubs showcasing unique artistic interpretations.

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Conflict of Interest

Regarding this paper's publication, the author declares no conflicts of interest.

Author Contribution

SS – conceived the idea of the innovation, FR – manuscript preparation, SS – Data collection (Articles, books etc.), AS – Assistance in manuscript preparation, AS – Finalization of Manuscript.

Ethics Approval

Not applicable

Informed Consent

All the respondents provided prior consent. All the images in this paper are taken by first author and explicit permission was obtained from all individuals in the images prior to their use.

Data Availability

The data related to this study will be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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