

# Locating Madhubani Painting in the Context of Cultural Tourism and Place Identity of Mithila Region

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## Abstract

Art is often a reflection of culture and is considered to be the repository of a society's collective memory. Researchers have long been interested in the relationship between art and culture. Art also has utilitarian influences on society and the times in which it is created in a cultural space is considered an integral component of culture. Different forms of art represent the diverse expressions of creative ideas in visual formats or performances that in turn, become an identity of a place. Madhubani paintings developed in the Mithilanchal region of Bihar are the perfect example of traditional art that maintained continuity through generations in the course of time and was assimilated gradually into the region's cultural setting. The tourism industry in India heavily banks on cultural tourism, and several communities have received a facelift by promoting places which are interesting for their heritage. Madhubani and nearby places in Bihar have a great tradition of paintings where visitors can find the authentic experience of these rich cultural features.

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The present study investigates the art tradition of Madhubani paintings, examining the challenges posed by commercialization and examining the scope of cultural tourism in the region.

**Keywords:** Madhubani painting, Mithilanchal, traditional art, art heritage, cultural tourism)

## 1. Introduction

In the backdrop of globalization, Indian culture has made quite an impression amongst visitors all across the world despite the fierce competitiveness among destinations worldwide. The perceptual values and growing demands for Indian art, history and culture remain an agenda for the potential international visitors (Ministry of Tourism, GoI, 2015). In its report (2016) on Models for Collaboration between Tourism, Culture and Community, World Tourism Organization highlighted that tourism, culture and community are inextricably linked because culture provides the essential means to support communities and communities in turn animate and reproduce culture. Tourism also provides economic support for culture, while culture provides essential content for tourism. Local communities are also vital in ensuring the sustainability of tourism by providing locally-embedded activities, and tourism supports the local community economically. In this sense, there is a sustainable triangular relationship between tourism, culture and community that potentially ensures that all these three areas benefit.

Mithila region, the northernmost part of Bihar (India) has a great potential to be developed as a cultural tourism destination. Nevertheless, there is a need to develop an insight into assessing its cultural resources and conceptualizing the cultural tourism development plan. The region has potential in terms of a wide range of cultural resources but at the same time, has many challenges too. Mithila Art is one such cultural treasure of this region that needs specialized attention to be developed as part of the 'cultural district' and eventually linking it to global tourism in the present scenario. It is clear from the ground situation that many important issues associated with culture and tourism in the context

of Mithila is underdeveloped both academically and otherwise. This research is relevant in encouraging a better understanding of Mithila with regard to exploring its cultural-heritage assets such as Mithila Art or Madhubani Paintings and the tourism potential of the region.

Madhubani Painting, also known as Mithila Painting or Mithila Art, is a household practice in the Mithila region, northernmost part of Bihar, and stretching into the plains of Nepal. During the 20th Century CE, this centuries-old art got significant recognition across the world. The unique style of drawing using fingers and tweaks, natural colors and the themes near social life, religious motifs, nature, love and fraternity make this art truly adored among the art lovers. From the sociological perspective, it is significant to learn that women predominantly make Madhubani paintings since its inception in a male-dominated society. During the early period, this art was of temporal nature i.e., it used to be made and wiped out during the short period and thus, there was no scope of preserving it. Nevertheless, since it was an integral part of the culture of Mithila region, passing down through knowledge sharing from mother to daughter, the art survived through centuries as an intangible heritage.

## **2. Objectives of the study**

The following specific objectives have been formed to achieve the study goals:

1. Investigate the art tradition of Madhubani paintings and its heritage value.
2. Examine the challenges posed by commercialization of the art form.
3. Study the scope of cultural tourism in the region to revitalize the art heritage of Madhubani paintings.

## **3. Methodology**

The present research is inductive research that uses constructionist research approach. In this approach, the researcher approaches the

research area without any preconceived notions, collects qualitative data through field work and understands the reality from different perspectives. The study used primary and secondary sources of information. Published researches in the field have been used to create the narrative on the origin and development of the art form. During the course of study, the researcher visited Jitwarpur, Ranti, Rashidpur and Simari villages in Madhubani district to collect the primary data during the month of November and December 2020 to conduct the field work. A list of traditional and commercial artists has been prepared based on the expertise, involvement and painting skills. A semi-structured questionnaire has been used to collect the required information for the research. The researcher interviewed 15 artists who live in the above-said areas and all the interviews have been recorded with the respondents' consent. The recorded interviews have been transcribed to English for the current research. Data collected from primary and secondary sources have been compiled to synthesize the findings.

### 3.1 Discussion

The following table indicates the profile of the respondents.

Sl.No.	Name of the Artist	Age in years and gender (Years)	Traditional/ Commercial (Art Form)	Village
1.	Kamal Narayan Karn	65(Male)	Traditional	Jitwarpur
2.	Nawal Kishore Das	68(Male)	Traditional	Jitwarpur
3.	Lalni Devi	66(Female)	Traditional	Jitwarpur
4.	Sunita Karn	45(Female)	Commercial	Jitwarpur
5.	Rupam Devi	40(Female)	Commercial	Jitwarpur
6.	Ajit Kumar Lal	45(Male)	Commercial	Jitwarpur
7.	Jyoti Dutta	35(Female)	Commercial	Jitwarpur
8.	Nandini Devi	52 (Female)	Commercial	Jitwarpur
9.	Hira Devi	65 (Female)	Traditional	Jitwarpur
10.	Padmashree Godavari Dutta	85(Female)	Traditional	Ranti
11.	Avinash Karn	30(Male)	Traditional	Ranti
12.	Putul Devi	28(Female)	Commercial	Ranti

13.	Mamta Devi	35(Female)	Commercial	Ranti
14.	Hira Devi	55(Female)	Traditional	Simari
15.	Sujit Kumar Lal	30(Male)	Commercial	Rasidpur

The majority of the respondents were females and many respondents were above 40 years of age. The response group included traditional artists and commercial artists. Most of the artists were from Jitwarpur village, followed by Ranti village.

### 3.1.1 Name and the Origins

The origin of Madhubani Art dates back to the period of Ramayana when Lord Rama ruled from Ayodhya. It is said that, Lord Rama and Goddess Sita met each other for the first time in ‘Madhuban’ (Forest of Honey). Etymologically the present town Madhubani (currently, an administrative district in the state of Bihar) is believed to derived from this particular forest mentioned in Ramayana. Another popular version is that King Janak, ruler of the ancient kingdom of Mithila, had asked his court-artists to capture the moments of his daughter Goddess Sita’s wedding to Prince Lord Rama, developing some ever-memorable paintings. And, since then it is believed to be the birth of Madhubani Painting in the Mithila region hundreds of centuries ago.

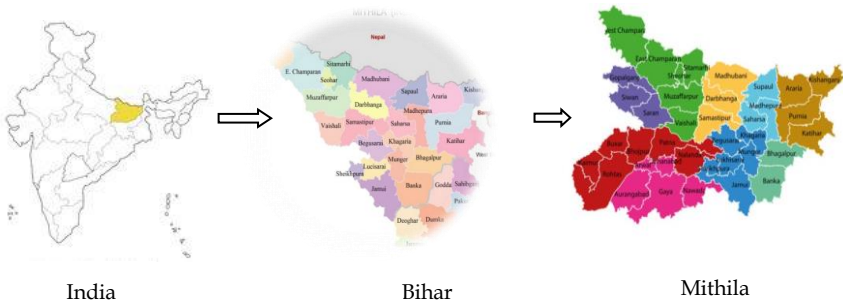


Fig 1: Location of Mithila (Sources: Google images, (<https://state.bihar.gov.in/main/SectionInformation.html?editForm&rowId=8,> )

Mithila as a geographical territory is bounded on the north by the Himalayan mountains, and the remaining three sides by rivers (on the south by the river Ganges, on the east by the river Kosi and on the west by the river Gandak). The area is roughly 22500 sq. miles

(Jha, 2013). It consists of the modern 17 districts of North Bihar. The ancient glory of Mithila region in the state of Bihar (India) makes it a truly potential heritage and cultural attraction for the visitors. Mithila is not merely one of the constructs of Indian mythology associated with Sita but also it is linked with some of the great philosophers, writers, poets and artists of India. The unique geographical and historical conditions also have a role in the cultural richness of this region.

The traditional knowledge of Mithila art was passed down from generation to generation (mother to daughter) and this art began to be a household practice in the region by virtue of people's love and passion for this art form. The women of the families practiced this art on the walls of their houses as well as on the mud-soils on special occasions or during festive times. The art often depicted their thoughts, hopes and dreams brought forth from their religious beliefs, cultural practices or nature-based themes. Over the time, Madhubani painting became an essential part of special events, (e.g., wedding, birth of child, upnayan etc.) and local festivities in the region.

The Madhubani painting dominated by the women of Mithila region was unknown to the outside world until the 20th century. In the year 1934 when the present state of Bihar witnessed one of the most disastrous earthquakes in the history of India, taking several lives and massive destruction of houses, a British colonial officer, W.G. Archer went on to assess the damage of this catastrophe and was fascinated by seeing the unique art on the newly exposed interiors of the walls in the form of debris. It was W. G. Archer, Art historian and curator, the cultural enthusiast who first drew attention to the mural paintings of the region and termed it as '*Mithila Painting*' (Archer, 1949; Thakur, 1988, p. 605). Archer, who later became the South Asia curator at London's Victoria and Albert Museum collected some of the paintings in black and white and compared them with the modernist like Picasso and others. Later, these paintings were featured in an article in the *Indian Art Journal*; Marg written by Archer in the year 1949 and this is how these wall paintings came into public attention for the first time outside the Mithila region.

The second transformative phase of the development of the Madhubani paintings can be seen after the great famine of Bihar, from the year 1966 onwards. Several national leaders and prominent personalities were of the opinion, noticing the severity of the calamity, that the region must get immediate financial packages or some industrial set up by the Govt. of India for the survival of the people of the region. After the Indo-China war (1962), the economy of the country was already in distress. It is said that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru asked Pupu Jayakar, to work out some proposal whereby rather than disbursing immediate monetary relief or heavy investment by the government, any other innovative proposal be made for the people of the Mithila region. Jayakar (1989,p.100) observed,

“I had visited Mithila in the mid-fifties but the village walls were blank and printed lithographs and calendars hung in the *Gosainghars* (sacred corner of the house allocated for the family - deity). The bleak dusk of poverty had sapped the will and the energy needed to ornament the home. Traces of old paintings were sometimes to be found, fragments that bore testimony to an inherited knowledge of color, form and iconography. I had spoken to some of the fair, lean faced women...the Bihar drought of 1968 accentuated the problem of finding light labor schemes for the women of the area and encouraged me to start a project to provide these women with hand-made paper on which they could paint.”

Jayakar visited the region in May 1968 again and she mentioned the change she experienced,

“old women, young women and girls, were bent over paper, painting with bamboo twigs and rags...within five months, the situation had changed. A sense of pride and joy had already permeated and transformed the women of Mithila. A simple dignity was visible, a poise and a supreme self-assurance” (Jayakar, 1989b).

Kamal Narayan Lal Karna, a traditional Mithila painting artist and nephew of the first *Padmashree* awardee (for Madhubani paintings), Late Jagdamba Devi of Jitwarpur village recalled,

“Bhaskar Kulkarni after reaching Jitwarpur village in 1960’s saw my aunt’s (Jagdamba Devi) artwork on the wall of her house and asked whether she could draw the same on a piece of paper. She nodded and did the same artwork on a piece of paper”.

Another traditional artist of Mithila painting of the same village, Mr. Nawal Kishore Das adds,

“Mr. Bhasker was quite impressed of Jagdamba Devi’s artwork on paper and visited some other artists of the village too. Mr. Bhasker distributed INR 10, 000 among the village artist only to get artwork on paper in return. Later, Mr. Kulkarni brought all the paintings (on paper) to an exhibition in New Delhi and collected some Rs. 50,000 by selling those paintings”.

This was the first ever commercial treatment of Mithila paintings to be widened and more popularized only domestically and even at global level.

### **3.1.2 Madhubani art and its heritage value**

Madhubani art has been a continuing tangible cultural tradition in the form of paintings in the Mithila region. The women of the region have practiced these paintings for centuries (Singh, 2020). Their art deals with the cultural identity and the social practices associated with myriad themes like religion, nature, love, and fertility. The specialty of Madhubani paintings is the selection of subjects from the notions of artistic expressions that find its basis in a deep-rooted cultural milieu. Traditionally, this art was made on mud-walls (called *Bhitti-Chitra*) or soil-ground (called *Aripan*) on special occasions like wedding, Diwali, Durga Puja or any other cultural festival and used to be erased soon. This is the primary reason why there has been no preservation of these works previously. And hence, these works were basically temporary in its natural settings. However, this immensely popular art traversed its path from one generation to another easily without any technical tool or preservation-efforts.



The region has witnessed several belief systems, rituals of the Brahminical religion, including tantric and Buddhist practices of the Vajrayana, each leaving its own imprint through motifs which find a place in the art. Over the centuries, the art has survived in the household's daily customs and continues to express itself in vivid, interesting forms with their naivety and simplicity (Chattopadhyay, 1995, 133). Apart from walls and floors that were the primary ground for paintings in Mithila, there was a tradition to paint other movable articles, such as earthen utensils, boxes, *siki* works as a part of marriage gift (*santh*). Most of the supports on which the painting was done, were perishable materials. They were made temporarily on the mud walls on auspicious occasions and renewed after weathering. It was a continuous process, keeping in mind the cycle of birth, death and re-birth. That is the reason we have hardly any examples of the paintings as archaeological evidences.

Upendra Thakur supporting its antiquity value as part of the intangible cultural heritage, wrote,

“the fact, however, remains that this act of painting has been carried on from times immemorial to the present day as part of the culture and as long as the culture persists there is no need for particular paintings to remain. The Painting dissolves but the style goes on” (Thakur, 1988, p. 606).



Fig 2, Paintings on the walls and gates of houses (Source: Authors)

Previously the artists used to paint with fingers or cotton wrapped bamboo twigs using natural colors and pigments. The colors are prepared by the traditional artists themselves using available materials in their surroundings such as leaves of the plants, flowers, ashes of traditional lamp (Diya), cow dung, rice grains, etc. Madhubani art which is dominated by women of the region is characterized by fine line drawings filled in by natural bright colors, fine contrast or an eye-catching pattern. These paintings are mostly made by the women artists of the region and thus signify a great deal in a male-dominated society. Although, Mithila art is practiced in every part of the region, but there are four major centers (villages) namely; Ranti, Jitwarpur, Rasidpur and Rahika (all within 5 Kms from the district headquarters of Madhubani). While Ranti and Rasidpur are famous for *Line Painting*, Jitwarpur and Rahika are famous for *color painting* within the Mithila Art forms as opined by Kamal Narayan Lal Karna, a traditional artist from Jitwarpur village.

Madhubani Paintings' themes are greatly influenced by religious motifs and the common belief system of the cultural space. The practicing artists of this traditional Indian art are driven by their love for nature and deep faith in Indian mythological figures. The art depicts various deities as well as objects associated with them based on the devotion of the artists. Fine drawing of natural objects such as the Sun, the Moon, Birds, Fish, and Flowers, Banyan tree or Tulsi (plant) are the most-painted common themes for the artists. Also, the most popular themes and designs are of Hindu-deities and episodes from epics and sacred texts.

Lalani Devi, State level awardee for Mithila paintings of the Jitwarpur village agreed that,

“there are no criteria for choosing Madhubani painting today in the digital era where the new age artists often breach a thin line between Mithila art and Fine Arts.”

Nevertheless, traditional artists used to choose a theme based on following rhyming:

Kali Durge Radhe Shyam

Gauri Shankar Sita Ram”

According to Rupam Devi, another Mithila painting artist of Jitwarpur village,

“traditional Mithila paintings used to convey a story in its artistic expression. However, today when Mithila paintings have been heavily commercialized, there is no boundary for choosing a specific theme. “

Sunita Karn, a traditional Madhubani painting artist and whose husband is also a state awardee artist, from a nearby village of Madhubani town observed,

“They have taught their daughters this art-making skill who now supersede them through innovative themes and fusion of Madhubani art with the modern art.”

### Commercialization of Madhubani Paintings

As per Mr. Ajit Kumar Lal, a traditional artist from Jitwarpur village,

“the commercialization of Madhubani paintings started in 1962 CE, when a foreign artist travelling through the villages of Ranti and Jitwarpur was surprised to see the murals on the village walls. The artist encouraged a woman artist to copy some of the works painted on the mud walls.”

The idea turned out to be a great success, and thereafter the Madhubani paintings have started selling in International and national art markets.



Fig 3: Madhubani paintings in foldable format (Source: Authors)

Madhubani a district headquarters under the jurisdiction of Darbhanga commissioner became visible on the cultural map of India due to the considerable concentration of painting practices in the area; Ranti, Rahika, Rashidpur and Jitwarpur villages attracted researchers, scholars, writers (Heinz: 2003; Jayakar, 1989; Thakur, 1982; Vequaud: 1977). Erika Moser, a German folklorist and filmmaker, spent four months in Jitwarpur in 1973, organised exhibitions in Germany and established a centre in the village. Ray Owens (1976) and Moser were instrumental in creating a production system and international marketing plan for Mithila art (Heinz: 2008, 23). Yves Vequaud's work in French, English and German, *L'Art du Mithila* (1976), *The Art of Mithila* (1977), *Die Kunst Von Mithila* (1977) with photographs of Eduard Boubat helped to achieve international recognition that created a new line of art connoisseurs and buyers far in the west. Taking cue from Archer and Vequaud, Hasegawa, David Szanton, popularised the style with their continuous initiatives and writings. Jagdamba Devi, Sita Devi, Ganga Devi, Maha Sundari Devi, Ookha Devi, Yamuna Devi, Godavari Dutta were gradually recognized as master painters of this style. They also got opportunities to show their works in exhibitions (*Musée de l'Homme*, 1973; *Magiciens de la Terre*, 1989, Paris) held in India and abroad.

In recent times, digital technology has changed how we know and what we worth knowing. New age artists are creating fusions of Madhubani paintings and western popular art designs. Recently, the Indian Railways created a new experience for commuters by painting train coaches through traditional Mithila art to beautify the coaches. This has earned much praise for Indian railways domestically and in foreign courtiers as well. Countries like Japan and Canada got inspiration from this new experiment and are planning to replicate this idea. Railway stations, Street walls, Government buildings including residences are painted with Madhubani paintings in Bihar. In recent times, the Mithila Painting has received widespread popularity and recognition across the world. These paintings have found place in several art galleries and exhibitions across countries. The Mithila Museum in Tokamachi, Japan founded by a famous Madhubani art lover, Hashegawa

exhibits around 1000 Madhubani paintings of various themes and styles (Singh 2020b).

#### 4. Traditional Vs. Commercial

The traditional paintings essentially require a suitable surface whether mud wall or paper/cloth/canvas (presently in vogue) and a minimal range of palette; pink, yellow, blue, red, parrot-green, black and white colours. They were mostly obtained from natural sources and are used after processing by the artists herself/himself. For outlines and thin details (*kachni* or *bharni* - hatching or cross-hatching), a small beaten bamboo-twig from the tip (so that the fiber is like hair) was used while for the bolder lines, a small piece of cloth is tied to a twig made the brush. The paint is directly applied while creating the outline in a single flow of brush. The painting is a kind of extempore one where no preliminary sketching is required (Thakur, 1988, p.606).

As the style shifted to paper and cloth, the imagery and scheme remained similar, while the medium changed. Artists are now using metal nibs and holders for outlining whereas bold detailing and color application is done by readymade brushes. The palettes are now filled with poster, acrylic and watercolors.



Fig 4: Madhubani Painting -New Generation; Paintings of Sri Avinash Karn  
(Source: Avinash Karn, Ranti, Madhubani)

Mithila painting in its earliest form appears as *aripan* and *kohbar*; or floor painting and wall painting 'written' by women during rituals

and ceremonies on the eve of certain occasions like *vratas*, *pujas*, weddings and festivals. Fertility is the main aspect of the *kohbar* painting where the essential symbols depict specific meanings, as *purain* (rapid proliferation), bamboo (abundance), sun (energy) and moon (nectar), *Naina Jogin* (to ward off evil eye), fish (good luck or fertility). Other popular themes of the style are borrowed from mythologies, *puranic* tales, local legends and decorative patterns. Renowned Mithila painter, Ganga Devi introduced many subjects based on her personal life and experiences such as the Japan series, the America series, Pilgrimage to Badrinath and the Cancer series (Jain, 1997).

The repertoire of Mithila art is continuously growing with participating young and energetic artists like Dulari Devi, Amrita Jha, Naresh Paswan, Rani Jha, Santosh Das, Mahalakshmi Karn, AvinashKarn and Sahlinikumari who have tried to push the boundaries in search of more conceptual subjects while maintaining its natural ethos. Scholars, historians and critiques have often categorized the form as individual styles of a particular caste such as Brahmin, Kayastha and Harijan style. However, the style in its whole gamut is purely regional and in its all grouping shares a similar genesis and function.

### **Synergy: art, people and challenges of continuity of this art form**

The artworks on mud-walls (*Bhitti chitras*) depict both iconoc and aniconic forms. The use of colours also has its significance with the religious beliefs and the way of living. Artist Naval Kishore Lal Das of Jitwarpur observed,

“*red* is the most used colour in Madhubani paintings as the same is considered auspicious.”

The Mithila region has been a centre of tantric practices for both the *Shaiva* and *Shakti* sects. There are certain practices of tantra prevalent since the medieval time. The tantric connection of Madhubani paintings is found in the literary works of scholars of Mithila such as of *Vidyapati* who lived in 12th century CE. Nevertheless, it went through several changes during the medieval period and very little history is known of this period.

India is culturally united in several aspects, having shared eating habits and belief systems, rituals, and tangible and intangible art forms of similar fashion. The decoration of walls with clay-plaster, mirrors, seeds, relief figures in clay, images of gods and goddesses in iconic and aniconic forms, flora and fauna and geometrical diagrams has been common in rural India cutting across regions (Jayakar, 1989c). The Aripān (floor-painting) of Mithila is quite akin to West Bengal's Alpana of the geometrical and decorative patterns drawn with rice paste (Elwyn, 1961, p.18). In ancient India, wall painting styles, which we have witnessed at Ajanata or Sittanavasal, are mentioned in silpa texts with their specifications and set grammar, so termed as classical. But the painting developed by the householders for the household in different parts of India has been free from grammar and boast a number of styles, selection of colours, patterns and symbols, preserving regional belief systems and practices. We find a similarity among the regional styles where the primitive form of worship, rituals of fertility, fecundity, and harvest find sources primarily from nature. Inspired by the rise of Mithila art, the simple rustic forms which were painted on auspicious occasions and yearly festivals on mud walls in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh (Pithora), Maharashtra (Warli), Jharkhand (Sohrai) and Odisha (Saura) are now painted on canvases, papers and other movable supports, and have received a new lease of life. The shift from in situ to movable forms (mostly encouraged by outsiders, scholars, researchers) has facilitated wider recognition and value for the artistic labour of regional artists.

In the words of Godavari Dutta (85 years), *Padmashree* awardee and resident of Ranti village,

“commercialization of Madhubani paintings have certainly helped artists in a big way, especially in terms of financial help as well as recognition in the ‘Art Sphere’. Nevertheless, traditional artists who are the real torch-bearers of these heritage skills are deprived of such benefits.”

The traditional artists occasionally get government recognition in the form of awards and the financial help. But such awards are limited in numbers and irregular in nature too.

According to Naval Kishore Das, “at times, there is lack of transparency in award selection too.”

On asking what needs to be done, Mr. Das says, authorities who hold high positions is the selection process must be from Art’s field and there should be a transparent system in place while selecting the artists for awards at state or national level.

A common concern for the artists of the region is that they do not get actual value for their artistic work. Rupam Devi, an artist from Jitwarpur observed,

“I earn even less than minimum daily wage considering the amount of time invested in the artwork”.

The reason, she cites, is the role of middleman for selling their artwork. Lalani Devi of the same village also expresses her grief that while they take all the pain and put every effort to make an art outstanding, the middle men make more out of it than she does; and so a proper system must be put in place to value the artist's efforts and work systematically and transparently. A formal community-based framework or any other effective system for selling the art works of the local artists may bring back glory to the artists and immortality to the Mithila Art itself.

### **Locating Madhubani Art in the context of cultural tourism**

As a major centre for the practice of Mithila Art, Madhubani is easily accessible via roadways, rail networks and airlines from all major cities of India. The district headquarters is only 25 kms away from the domestic airport of Darbhanga. The region has an array of tourism treasures such as natural, cultural and many man-made features. Several local fairs and festivals add to the beauty of Mithila as a potential cultural-heritage tourism destination. The recent developments and accolades have brought the Madhubani paintings to a greater popularity and appreciation level across the world.

The benefits of closer links between culture and tourism go beyond the economic returns: travelling to experience the culture of others also means gaining a direct appreciation of cultural diversity, establishing new cultural ties, and helping to keep our cultural



heritage alive (*Tourism and Culture Synergies*, UNWTO report, 2018). This region's age-old cultural traditions could be a big attraction from tourism point of view (Lal, 2008). The Mithila paintings and handicrafts have earned a quite fame worldwide, while several countries of South-East Asia (Japan, Nepal, China Sri Lanka, etc.) have given special importance to these artworks. Mithila region can well tap on its strength as a cultural destination, especially - ever increasing popularity of Mithila art.

In the recent times several non-governmental organizations as well as by government agencies have promoted Madhubani art and helped it to find wider recognition. Be it fashion or handicrafts or other innovative ideas, artists have been continuously evolving this art form to get global recognition in the digital era. Many designers have introduced a range of Madhubani art patterns and motives in their collection of ethnic wear (Stoles, Sarees, Salwar kameez, long skirts, etc.). Many other day-to-day useable products like pen-cases, bags, diaries, and so on are made with Mithila art and are quite popular. During the Covid-19 time, hand-made masks with Madhubani art are quite popular and have got wide attention across regions.

The Government of India has already introduced several schemes to put this region on the International tourism map with the introduction of regional tourism expansion plans like the Ramayana Circuit and the Ayodhya Circuit linking Janakpur (Nepal) in the Mithila region. Major sites of both the above circuits are situated in the Mithila region. As cultural tourism is set to remain one of the key tourism markets in the future, there is a greater scope in revitalizing Madhubani art through cultural tourism. The expanded range of cultural phenomena consumed by tourists will also increase the range of stakeholders involved in this market. Local communities become one of the key factors to the sustainable development of cultural experiences (*Tourism and Culture Synergies*, UNWTO report, 2018). Mithila region has the advantage of having proximity to Bodhgaya, one of the most visited Buddhist sites worldwide as well as a UNESCO World Heritage site, in its close proximity (around 200 Kms). Another

important destination, Janakpur (Nepal), as a Hindu pilgrimage site is already within its boundary.

Tourism is found to be of help in the revival of the local people's pride and interest in their culture, traditions and values. Tourism can help in re-establishing traditional skills and a sense of belonging to the cultural space. These aspects of culture have always fascinated the new age travelers while exploring and visiting new places. A closer consideration into these aspects and devising a strategy to package the offerings of this cultural land to the visitors will certainly augment the preservation of the cultural heritage of the region.

## **Conclusion**

This paper explores the historical evolution of *Mithila Art* as a cultural heritage of Mithila region drawing on people's account of the region. Mithila Art has an interesting trajectory in the course of its inception as a traditional folk art up to its commercialized form. This paper critically analyses its heritage importance as a timeless tradition along with its ever-increasing popularity across the border. This article analyses Mithila Art in terms of its design, variations and other artistic expressions. The paper looks closely into the synergy between the people and art of the region giving references to history and societal phenomena. The article also delves into the possible cultural tourism phenomena based on the cultural richness of the region.

Culture has an immeasurable inherent value to its host communities, and as such, constitutes one of the most important assets of tourism. Reciprocally, tourism can be a considerable force for promoting and conserving tangible and intangible heritage while encouraging the development of arts, crafts, and other creative activities (UNWTO report, 2018). Art-loving people from all across the world have taken keen interest in Madhubani paintings in recent times. This is one reason why this art got a prominent place in a short time. Madhubani paintings have gained popularity in countries such as Japan, Germany, France, Canada

and the USA. The place of origin of this art, Mithila could be a centre of tourist attraction in the forthcoming years.

Special interest tourism is a fast-growing and highly lucrative alternative to traditional form of mass tourism. Diverse travel interests create demand for niche tourism products. Furthermore, niche tourism has a great potential in regions like Mithila, which can support the artists as well as it can contribute to the local economy in a sustainable manner. Madhubani painting has such potential along with the other cultural treasures of the region. It can create awareness and inculcate sense of pride among the local people and preserve this great art for the coming generations.

A limitation of the current research is that the present study has not minutely documented the existential crisis of the artists and art heritage in Mithila region. There exist future research options to explore the lost traditions of Mithila art and methods to revive such form with the help of experts in the area. Another future research area is to explore the use of technology in documenting the patterns, features and themes of the art forms so that it can be digitally preserved for the future.

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