



THE ETERNAL ELEGANCE OF MADHUBANI ART: FOSTERING ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL CONSERVATION WHILE EMPOWERING WOMEN

BHAWANA SINGH

Ph.D. Research Scholar & Assistant Professor, Department of History, Nilambar Pitambar University, Palamu, Jharkhand. E-mail: singhbhawana47@gmail.com

Abstract: Madhubani art, a traditional Indian art form originating from the Mithila region of Bihar, offers a unique intersection of cultural heritage and environmental conservation. Traditionally practiced by women, this art form uses natural dyes and pigments, often derived from locally available plants and minerals, making it inherently eco-friendly. The themes of Madhubani paintings frequently depict nature, including flora, fauna, and human interactions with the environment, thus reflecting a deep connection between the community and their natural surroundings. The role of Madhubani art in social and ecological conservation is multifaceted. On a social level, it empowers local women by providing them with a source of income and a means to express their cultural identity. The art form has evolved from its ritualistic origins to become a significant economic activity, contributing to the socioeconomic development of the region. Additionally, the collaborative nature of creating Madhubani art fosters community bonds and promotes the transfer of traditional knowledge across generations. Ecologically, Madhubani art serves as a medium for environmental education and awareness. By depicting themes of biodiversity, conservation, and the human-nature relationship, these paintings highlight the importance of preserving natural habitats and species. The use of sustainable materials in creating these artworks further emphasizes the need for eco-friendly practices. Moreover, contemporary Madhubani artists are increasingly addressing pressing environmental issues such as deforestation, climate change, and wildlife protection through their work. By incorporating modern environmental themes, they are expanding the traditional scope of Madhubani art to include advocacy and awareness, thus playing a critical role in ecological conservation efforts. Madhubani art is not only a testament to the rich cultural heritage of the Mithila region but also a powerful tool for social and ecological conservation. Its sustainable

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practices, community-building aspects, and role in environmental education make it a significant contributor to both cultural preservation and ecological sustainability.

Keywords: Ecological, Social, Conservation, Sustainability, Community

Introduction

The predominant feature of traditional Indian art and culture lies in its profound spirituality. Artists and craftsmen, nurtured within a spiritual environment, naturally infuse their creations with spiritual essence. From time immemorial, India has been distinguished by a rich heritage of Tribal and Folk art and culture. The diverse artistic and cultural expressions created by India's tribal and rural communities consistently showcase their boundless creativity and imaginative brilliance. Folk paintings, in particular, hold a significant place in this heritage. They are crucial in defining the cultural identity of human life, offering a visual narrative that connects people to their roots. Without these folk paintings, the cultural essence and identity of many communities would be incomplete. India is a vast country with 30 states, each possessing its own unique cultural and traditional identity. These identities are vividly portrayed through various prevalent art forms that reflect the regional diversity. Each state's art forms contribute to a tapestry of cultural expression that enriches the nation's heritage. Among the most celebrated folk paintings in India are the intricate *patachitra* paintings from Odisha, known for their detailed and colourful depictions (Welch: 1985: 23). The Nirmal paintings of Andhra Pradesh are revered for their exquisite craftsmanship and rich imagery. Maharashtra is famous for Warli folk paintings, which employ simple yet profound motifs to tell stories of daily life and traditions. However, the Madhubani paintings from Bihar stand out as the most widely recognized and appreciated. These paintings, with their vibrant colours and intricate designs, have gained acceptance and admiration not just within India but globally as well. Together, these art forms highlight the extraordinary artistic

heritage of India, reflecting the spiritual, cultural, and traditional values of its diverse communities.

Madhubani, translating to "forest of honey" (from 'Madhu' meaning honey and 'Ban' meaning forest), is a region located in the Mithila area of Nepal and the northern part of Bihar, specifically in the Madhubani district. This ancient art form, thriving in both rural and urban settings, captures not only the legends and mythologies of ancient culture but also illustrates the harmonious blend of art, life, and the environment. With a rich history spanning over 2,500 years, Madhubani paintings are steeped in tradition and cultural significance (Archer: 1949: 26). According to legend, the origins of these paintings trace back to the epic *Ramayana*. It is said that during this time, King Janaka commissioned an artist to depict the wedding of his daughter Sita to Prince Rama (Das: 2023). This marked the inception of Madhubani art, which has since evolved but continues to embody the essence of its historical and mythological roots. Madhubani paintings are characterized by their intricate patterns, vibrant colours, and symbolic motifs, often reflecting themes from nature, folklore, and religious epics. These artworks not only serve as decorative pieces but also as cultural narratives, preserving the stories and traditions of the Mithila region. Through the years, Madhubani art has gained recognition and appreciation for its unique style and profound cultural significance, both within India and around the world.

Madhubani painting received official recognition in 1970 when the President of India honoured Mrs. Jagdamba Devi from the village of Jitbarpur near Madhubani with an award. This recognition marked a significant milestone, highlighting the importance and uniqueness

of this art form (Kumar: 2017). On one hand, Madhubani paintings have sparked a revolution in the art world with their distinctive style and cultural richness. On the other hand, they are increasingly influencing the fashion industry, with their intricate designs and vibrant patterns being incorporated into contemporary clothing and accessories. The classification of Madhubani paintings as either folk art or home art remains ambiguous. Regardless of the terminology used, there is no denying that these paintings are a crucial part of Mithila's social fabric. They are not only cherished within the Mithila region but also hold a significant place in the broader cultural heritage of India. This art form continues to thrive, reflecting the traditions and stories of the past while adapting to modern contexts, thus maintaining its relevance and importance in today's society.

Madhubani paintings originated from various sects of people, leading to the development of five distinct styles, each with unique characteristics and cultural significance. **Tantrik Style:** This style is dedicated to depicting religious texts and characters, focusing solely on spiritual and mythological themes. **Kohbar Style:** Traditionally painted on the walls of a *kohbar* (a nuptial chamber), this style is primarily created by women from the lower classes of society (Anand: 1984: 36). **Bharni Style:** Known for its technique of filling enclosed areas with vibrant colours, this style was predominantly practiced by people from the upper castes. **Godna Style:** Resembling modern tattoos, this style involves designs often applied to the arms and legs, akin to traditional body art. **Katchni Style:** Characterized by the use of only two colours, this style remains popular among the *Kayasthas*, a specific social group. Over time, contemporary artists have merged these five styles, creating a more unified and versatile form of Madhubani art. The themes in Madhubani paintings often revolve around Hindu deities such as Krishna, Rama, Lakshmi, Shiva, Durga, and Saraswati (Thakur: 1982: 11). Additionally, celestial bodies like the sun and the moon

frequently serve as central motifs, symbolizing their importance in the natural and spiritual world. These themes reflect the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mithila region, preserving ancient traditions while evolving with modern artistic influences.

Madhubani art goes beyond merely depicting images; it captures the deep emotions and cultural essence of the people of Mithila. This art form has had a profound and multifaceted impact on the lives of the people in Bihar. Notably, it has reached out to a previously overlooked segment of society—Bihar's women—providing them with a significant source of income and empowerment. Madhubani art also reflects the social divisions within society, with caste influences evident in the various styles and subjects of the paintings. This aspect highlights the social realities and hierarchical structures that persist within the community. One of the most remarkable aspects of Madhubani art is its environmental significance. It has emerged as a powerful tool for promoting ecological balance in Mithila and across Bihar. The themes and practices associated with this art form often emphasize the importance of nature, fostering a deeper connection to and respect for the environment. Through its vibrant and symbolic representations, Madhubani art plays a crucial role in environmental conservation efforts, making it not just an artistic expression but a vital component of ecological and social sustainability.

Madhubani Art: Uplifting the Women of Bihar

In Bihar, where household chores were traditionally the only recognized form of women's artistry, the emergence of Madhubani art has revolutionized this perception. Previously unrecognized as artists, these women have now gained significant recognition and become a vital workforce in the artistic realm. Madhubani art has become a remedy for unemployment among rural women, providing them with employment opportunities and elevating their status in society. This transformation is particularly significant in

Bihar, a state striving for women's empowerment. Madhubani art not only provides livelihoods for women in Madhubani and Bihar but also resonates across the country. Women from the Mithila region have adeptly transitioned their techniques of '*Bhittichitra*' or wall paintings onto paper and, more recently, onto fabrics. This adaptation has allowed them to preserve their cultural heritage while adapting to the evolving tastes and preferences of the broader public. Thus, Madhubani art stands as a testament to the resilience and creativity of Bihar's women, empowering them economically and socially while preserving their rich artistic traditions.

Madhubani painting transcends mere artistic expression for the women of Bihar; it serves as a profound medium through which they convey their desires, dreams, expectations, hopes, and aspirations to the world. This art form is emblematic, capturing day-to-day experiences and deeply held beliefs with intricate detail and symbolism. Originating as an exclusively feminine school of folk painting, Madhubani has been traditionally passed down from generation to generation among the women of the Mithila region. In Mithila, women engage in a diverse range of artistic practices: painting on walls, surfaces, movable objects, and canvases; crafting images of gods, goddesses, animals, and mythological figures from clay; creating utilitarian objects such as baskets and containers from *sikki* grass; and embellishing quilts (known as *kethari* and *sujani*) with intricate embroidery (Viswanathan, 2010). These artistic pursuits are not merely tasks but integral components of a woman's daily life, shaping her into a complete creative personality. She embodies roles as a singer, sculptor, painter, and embroidery designer, each activity contributing to the aesthetic marvel that is Madhubani painting. Through these artistic endeavours, women in Mithila not only preserve their cultural heritage but also assert their creative prowess and cultural identity, showcasing the rich tapestry of their lives and traditions to the world.

This influential art form had humble beginnings, sparked by Sita Devi, a trailblazing Madhubani artist whose work profoundly impacted the socio-political landscape of rural India. Sita Devi pioneered the '*bharni*' style, traditionally confined to homes, and elevated it to public prominence both within India and internationally. Her artistic contributions were formally acknowledged by the Government of India in 1981, when she was honoured with the prestigious Padma Shri award. Beyond her artistic achievements, Sita Devi embarked on a transformative project aimed at empowering her community. She dedicated herself to teaching Madhubani art to 1000 villagers, thereby not only preserving the cultural heritage but also providing a means for social and economic upliftment. This initiative not only empowered individuals economically but also instilled a sense of pride and identity within the community, showcasing the transformative power of art in fostering societal change and development.

Mahasundari Devi, hailing from Ranti village, emerged as a prominent figure in the world of Madhubani art. Breaking away from tradition, she discarded the purdah system and took up the brush, becoming renowned for her mastery of this intricate folk art. Her artworks, deeply rooted in Hindu mythology and everyday rural life scenes, quickly became synonymous with the Madhubani style. Mahasundari Devi's dedication and skill were recognized with several prestigious awards. In 1982, she was honoured by the President of India for her significant contributions to the art form. Later, in 2011, she was conferred with the Padma Shri, India's fourth-highest civilian award, acknowledging her paramount role in promoting Madhubani art. Her artistic expertise extended beyond painting; Mahasundari Devi was also adept in '*Sikki*' work, '*Sujni*' craft, and clay art within the realm of Madhubani. Her artistic legacy continues through her sister-in-law, Karpuri Devi, and her granddaughter, Pushpa Kumari, both of whom have carried forward her distinctive style and contributed to the ongoing

legacy of Madhubani art. Mahasundari Devi's life and art serve as a testament to the transformative power of creativity, breaking barriers of tradition and gender norms, and leaving an indelible mark on the cultural heritage of Bihar and beyond.

Dulari Devi, inspired by the artistic legacies of Mahasundari Devi and Karpuri Devi, has significantly evolved Madhubani art beyond its traditional boundaries. She expanded the colour palette beyond primary colours, introducing new hues and techniques that enriched the art form's expressive range. Despite being unable to read or write, Dulari Devi collaborated with Gita Wolf to share her remarkable journey in her autobiography titled 'Following My Paintbrush' (Jain, 2018). This publication not only chronicles her personal story but also highlights the transformative power of art in her life and community. Coming from a fishermen's community, Dulari Devi is passionate about promoting education among children from the Mallah community. Her dedication extends beyond artistry, aiming to empower young minds through education, thereby fostering social change and development within her community. Dulari Devi's commitment to preserving and innovating Madhubani art, coupled with her advocacy for education, exemplifies how creativity and cultural heritage can inspire positive social impact and empowerment in marginalized communities. Pushpa Kumari, the granddaughter of Mahasundari Devi, has made a significant impact by bringing Madhubani art to mainstream platforms. Her artworks not only illustrate spiritual themes but also delve into pressing social issues such as HIV, female feticide, child marriage, and the dowry system (Ahmad: 2014). Through her art, she offers a unique perspective that combines traditional aesthetics with contemporary social commentary. In addition to established artists like Pushpa Kumari, young female artists are also embracing Madhubani art as a powerful medium of expression. Mahalaxmi is one such emerging artist who uses this art form to initiate dialogues on issues like street harassment and education. These artists are bridging gaps between personal,

political, and professional aspects of life through their artworks, which serve as reflections of their lived realities. These women artists are not just following the footsteps of their predecessors but are actively reshaping the narrative of Madhubani art. Their artworks challenge patriarchal norms and celebrate their cultural heritage while addressing contemporary societal challenges. By leveraging their artistic skills, they are not only illustrating history but actively contributing to its creation, making Madhubani art a dynamic force for social change and empowerment.

In today's digital age, Madhubani painting has transcended traditional mediums like wall paintings and textiles to become an integral part of the economy, exemplified by the online platform '*iMithila*'. Founded in 2016 by Ruchi Jha and her mother-in-law Renuka Kumari, '*iMithila*' represents a pioneering initiative under Startup India. Ruchi Jha and Renuka Kumari, as social entrepreneurs, have harnessed the ancient art of Madhubani painting, adapting its intricate designs onto apparel and home décor products. Through their ecommerce platform, they showcase and sell these uniquely crafted items, thereby introducing Madhubani art to a global audience. By leveraging digital technology and ecommerce, '*iMithila*' not only promotes the cultural heritage of Madhubani but also provides economic opportunities for local artisans. This innovative approach not only preserves the artistic tradition but also ensures its sustainability in the modern marketplace. Through initiatives like '*iMithila*', Madhubani art continues to thrive as a dynamic cultural expression, connecting tradition with contemporary global markets while empowering artisans and promoting economic growth in the region (Patel: 2020: 54).

Usha Mehta has played a pivotal role in elevating Madhubani art to international acclaim through her enterprise, Petals Crafts, established in 1991. Under her leadership, Petals Crafts has grown significantly, establishing a strong global presence and gaining recognition under India's MSMEs program. Usha Mehta's efforts have

taken Madhubani art to prestigious international platforms. She showcased Petals Crafts at the “India Show” in St. Petersburg, Russia in 2009 and at the “World Indian Festival” in Singapore in 2014 (Narayani: 2018). These events not only showcased the artistic richness of Madhubani but also enhanced its reputation globally. Recognized as a prominent figure in Bihar’s art industry, Usha Mehta’s influence was underscored when she presented a remarkable 14-foot painting to former President Pratibha Patil during her visit to Bihar. This painting now adorns the Rashtrapati Bhavan, symbolizing the cultural richness and artistic prowess of Madhubani art on a national stage. Through her dedication and entrepreneurial spirit, Usha Mehta has not only expanded the reach of Madhubani art but has also contributed to its preservation and prosperity, ensuring its enduring legacy both within India and across international borders (Sopan: 2017).

In a society historically dominated by patriarchy, Madhubani art has defied norms by being pioneered, nationally recognized, and internationally acknowledged primarily through the efforts of women. From its inception to its current stature, females have indeed been the backbone of this celebrated art form in Bihar. Madhubani art has been transformative for women on multiple fronts. Economically, it has provided livelihoods and entrepreneurial opportunities, enabling women to contribute financially to their households and communities. Psychologically, it has empowered women by validating their artistic talents and offering a platform for self-expression and creativity. Culturally and socially, Madhubani art has revitalized traditions, preserving cultural heritage while fostered pride and identity among women artists. For many women, Madhubani art has been more than just a means of income—it has been a pathway to broader recognition and participation in society. Formerly confined within the confines of domestic life, women now have avenues to showcase their skills and stories on national and global stages. This empowerment signifies not only economic independence but

also a shift in societal roles and perceptions, where women are seen as integral contributors to both the economy and cultural heritage of the country. Through their artistic endeavours, women in Bihar have reshaped narratives, challenged stereotypes, and carved out spaces of influence and recognition. Madhubani art stands as a powerful symbol of resilience, creativity, and the transformative potential of cultural expression in promoting gender equality and social change.

Social Conservation through Madhubani Art: A Dalit Outlook

Madhubani art has emerged not only as a source of empowerment for women but also as a visual representation of the marginalized Dalit community. In the Mithila region, particularly, women from Dalit sub-castes, such as ‘Dusadh’ and ‘Chamar’, have mastered a distinct style of Madhubani art that differs from the traditional paintings practiced by Brahman and Kayastha women. Historically, Madhubani art was initiated by Brahman and Kayastha women, who held higher social status in Bihar’s villages but were still subordinated within their communities. However, deeper investigations have uncovered that Dalit women, despite societal barriers, developed their unique artistic expressions. They introduced new themes and motifs that reflected their experiences and perspectives, thus contributing to the rich diversity of Madhubani art. This evolution not only highlights the creativity and resilience of Dalit women but also challenges the traditional narrative of art being solely within the domain of socially privileged groups. Madhubani art, through the lens of Dalit women, becomes a powerful tool for cultural expression, social commentary, and reclaiming identity within the broader societal context of Bihar and beyond.

The inclusion of Dalit women in the realm of Madhubani art can be attributed to the pioneering efforts of German anthropologist Erika Moser, who in 1978 inspired and guided Dusadh women to embrace this art form. This initiative marked a significant turning point, empowering Dalit

women to reclaim their cultural heritage and assert their economic independence and social recognition. Under Moser's guidance, Dusadh women began incorporating their oral history, including tales of Raja Salhesh and depictions of their primary deity, Rahu, into Madhubani paintings (Das: 2013: 48). This infusion of their unique narratives and artistic styles introduced a distinct flavour to the region's flourishing art scene, challenging the established dominance of Brahmin women artists. Initially hesitant due to their unfamiliarity with elaborate painting styles and Hindu customs dominated by Brahmin artists, Dusadh women nonetheless embarked on their journey of Madhubani painting with determination. They focused on painting trees, flowers, and creating low relief clay figures of deities and animals on their home's external walls, thus carving out a cultural space for themselves within Bihar's societal hierarchy. The evolution of Dalit art through Madhubani paintings represents a form of resistance and assertion, allowing Dalit women to transcend historical marginalization and assert their identity and creativity. Today, the Dusadh community stands as a vibrant and active force in Mithila and Bihar's cultural landscape, showcasing the transformative power of art in fostering social inclusion and cultural diversity (Patwardhan: 2016).

Malvika Raj, a prominent Dalit woman artist from Samastipur, Bihar, has challenged traditional norms within Madhubani art by illustrating folklore related to Buddha's era. However, her innovative approach to portraying narratives through Madhubani art has faced resistance from the mainstream community, leading to harassment for deviating from the conventional depiction of Hindu mythology. Despite these challenges, several Dalit artists have made significant contributions to the cultural upliftment of their community. Artists like Dulari Devi, Rajesh Paswan, Shivan Paswan, Chunnu Devi, and Roudi Paswan, despite belonging to low castes, have achieved notable success (Thakur: 1982: 23). They have infused Madhubani art with

a local rural flavour, introducing new styles such as the *Gobar* style pioneered by Jamuna Devi. This technique involves using a light cow dung wash on paper, which enhances the vividness of bright colours, gaining immense recognition and commercial demand in markets, even influencing painters from upper castes. Jamuna Devi's mud frescos and paintings have been showcased in major exhibitions in Japan, New Delhi, Patna, and Varanasi, highlighting the growing recognition of subaltern art forms propagated by Dalit artists. Another significant art form is *Godna*, or tattoo paintings, rooted in the rituals and traditions of the Nat community. For Dalit women, *Godna* represents a form of subaltern expression and resistance against historical discrimination, where they were once restricted to wearing ornaments of inferior materials as per the *Manusmriti*. Notably, artists like Chano Devi and Roudi Paswan have emerged as leading figures in the *Godna* tradition, despite facing multiple layers of inequality and suppression as Dalit women (Dasgupta: 1954: 9). Many Dalit women artists are often illiterate and economically disadvantaged, which further complicates their recognition and individual attribution in the art world. Despite these challenges, Dalit women artists continue to defy stereotypes and assert their artistic identities through Madhubani art, contributing to a broader cultural dialogue and the ongoing transformation of traditional art forms in Bihar and beyond. Their resilience and creativity serve as a testament to the power of art in addressing social inequalities and advocating for cultural diversity and inclusivity.

Madhubani art has become a powerful tool of resistance for Dalits, challenging the historical monopoly of upper castes in art and architecture. The active engagement of Dalit artists has infused this art form with new perspectives, providing a platform for them to fearlessly express their marginalized views and experiences. The evolution of Dalit art through Madhubani paintings signifies more than just creative expression; it represents a significant mode of resistance. By asserting their artistic talents and

cultural narratives, Dalit artists have carved out social spaces within the hierarchical structure of society. This artistic rebellion not only empowers Dalits but also challenges entrenched notions of artistic superiority based on caste. Through their artworks, Dalit artists depict themes and narratives that reflect their lived realities, histories, and struggles. This transformative process not only revitalizes Madhubani art but also fosters a broader cultural dialogue that acknowledges and celebrates diversity within Indian art forms. Overall, Madhubani art has emerged as a beacon of social change and empowerment for Dalits, providing them with a platform to reclaim their cultural heritage and challenge systemic inequalities. It stands as a testament to the resilience and creativity of Dalit communities in reshaping the narrative of art and culture in India.

Preserving Nature's Splendour through the Timeless Elegance of Madhubani Art

The vibrant and contemporary folk art of Madhubani paintings carries a profound message of conservation and reflects the rich biodiversity of the region. These paintings vividly illustrate various forms of flora and fauna, highlighting their benefits and serving as a repository of local biodiversity. Every element of Madhubani art is intricately linked to nature, with the colours being derived from plants and animals. For instance, black is made by mixing soot with cow dung; yellow is obtained from turmeric, pollen, or the milk of banyan leaves; blue comes from indigo; red from the Kusum flower juice or red sandalwood; green from the leaves of the wood apple tree; white from rice powder; and orange from Palasha flowers. These raw materials are blended with goat's milk and bean plant juice, forming an authentic directory of the region's natural resources (Tiwari: 2018: 1-7). However, the scarcity of certain plants and the high cost of extracting colours from them have led to the use of synthetic chemicals in the paintings. This shift is due to the diminishing availability of trees, which has prompted the women of Madhubani to take

decisive action to conserve Bihar's green cover. Their efforts are a response to the environmental degradation that threatens the traditional methods and materials of their beloved art form.

The motifs in Madhubani designs encompass conventionalized depictions of flora and fauna, series of circles, spiral or curvilinear patterns, sequences of short lines, and fragmentary illustrations that tell stories and legends. These motifs provide glimpses into the environmental and natural life of the region. Religious paintings feature various gods and goddesses, while the secular and decorative paintings include symbols of prosperity and fertility such as elephants, horses, fish, lions, parrots, turtles, bamboo, lotus flowers, *puraina* leaves, *pana* (water weeds), and creepers (Sinha: 2018: 35). Therefore, it is evident that nature plays a central role in this art form, with all elements being closely linked to natural beings. When discussing compassion for nature, the pivotal role of women in ecological conservation becomes apparent. Indian women have consistently led ecological movements, standing as guardians of nature. A notable example is the Chipko Movement of the 1970s in Uttaranchal, where women actively participated to save trees. This movement not only protected a large number of trees but also set a national example of selfless dedication to nature. However, the Chipko Movement is not the only instance of women-led ecological conservation. A similar movement has emerged in Bihar, where women have taken the lead once again, using the unique medium of Madhubani paintings to prevent tree cutting. Through their art, they have found a creative and powerful way to advocate for the preservation of the environment.

A lush green region in northern Bihar is renowned for its traditional Madhubani paintings. However, in recent years, deforestation has led to a noticeable decline in the area's forest cover. In response, the women of Madhubani district devised a unique strategy to prevent the felling of trees. Shashthi Nath Jha, the secretary of the self-help group Gram Vikas Parishad, initiated this movement to address the issue (Rai: 2022: 61-

68). In 2013, she began raising awareness about environmental conservation and encouraged women and girls to join the cause. This initiative had a profound impact, inspiring a large number of women in the Madhubani district to take a stand in a very artistic way: by painting the trees. The Madhubani paintings created by these women often feature religious themes. This imbues the trees with a sense of sanctity in the eyes of the local people, thereby protecting them from being cut down. Additionally, the tree trunks are first coated with lime, which not only provides a suitable white background for the paintings but also protects the trees from insects. The women painted images of deities such as Rama, Sita, Krishna, Buddha, and Mahavira, transforming each tree into a living temple. This innovative approach has been highly effective in protecting the trees. Today, trees along a five-kilometre stretch in the region are adorned with Madhubani paintings, turning the area into an attractive destination for tourists and travellers. This creative method of tree conservation not only preserves the environment but also enhances the cultural and aesthetic value of the region.

The Madhubani paintings have not only contributed to the preservation of trees in the Madhubani district but also played a significant role in elevating the Madhubani railway station to the second position among the top ten most beautiful railway stations in Bihar. This historic railway station, one of the oldest in India, has become a tourist attraction after hundreds of local Mithila artists adorned its walls with the renowned Madhubani paintings. This extensive artwork was undertaken as part of the Swachh Bharat mission and was completed through 'Shramdaan' (voluntary labour) to promote and preserve the traditional art form. Officials claim this is the largest display of Mithila artwork in the world, with potential to break previous Guinness World Records. The railway authorities provided the necessary supplies, including colours, painting brushes, and refreshments. Upon completion, the artists were honoured for their contributions. This project has not only transformed the appearance of

the railway station but also highlighted the cultural heritage and artistic skill of the Madhubani region, attracting tourists and art enthusiasts alike.

Conclusion

These beautiful and colourful paintings thus have a dual impact on the ecology of Bihar, contributing to both environmental conservation and beautification. Each painting on walls, trees, floors, clothes, or other articles tells a unique story, often featuring elements of nature and traditional symbols. The meticulous depiction of Bihar's traditions and culture in these paintings makes them a cultural emblem of the state. Madhubani art has been an inseparable part of Mithila life, gaining global recognition and accolades for its beauty. Every religious and social occasion inspires women to decorate the walls of their houses with these enchanting paintings, providing aesthetic satisfaction and joy. Each nation has a unique way of expressing itself and for India, the love of nature and spiritual concepts has always been paramount, reflected in the themes of Madhubani art. However, the commercialisation of this folk art has posed significant threats. The global market's buyer-centric approach has compromised the originality of colours, designs, motifs, and the sensitivity of this great art form. This commercialization has also drawn interest from men, who now paint without understanding the traditional significance of women in this art. For them, it is a job opportunity, and they are willing to paint anything to meet buyers' demands, often in the name of Mithila painting. Despite these challenges, Madhubani art has endured and flourished across various aspects, including culture, social life, women's empowerment, ecological conservation, and tradition. The social richness of this art lies in the fact that women are its primary custodians. The paintings should be seen as individual artists' work, combining traditional aspects with inspiration from historical sources and personal innovation. The central themes of these paintings are love and fertility, making wall hangings, murals, and tapestries from this art form popular choices for adding colour and vitality to interior spaces.

Illustrations



Fig. 3.1: The Bharni style of Madhubani painting

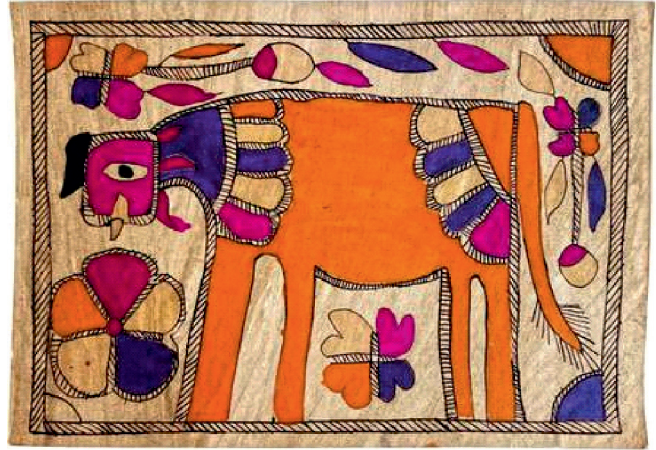


Fig. 3.4: Cow in Gobar Style by Jamuna Devi



Fig. 3.2: Katchni Style Madhubani Painting of Elephant



Fig. 3.5: Kohbar Style of Madhubani art



Fig. 3.3: Depiction of Raja Salhesh in Godna style

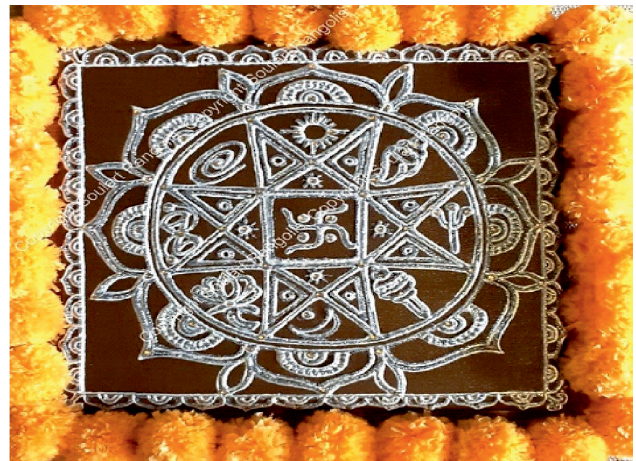


Fig. 3.6: Aripana (Kohbar Style)



Fig. 3.7: *Latpatia Suga* (Kohbar Style)

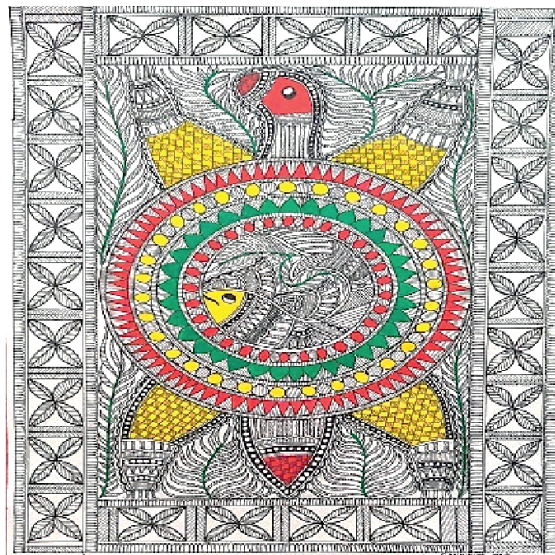


Fig. 3.10: Tortoise



Fig. 3.8: *Bidh-Bidhata* (Kohbar Style)



Fig. 3.11: Conch-Shell



Fig. 3.9: Fish



Fig. 3.12: Depiction of Bhairava



Fig 3.13: Depiction of Yogic guru sitting on a lotus in tantric style.



Fig. 3.14: Theme of nature

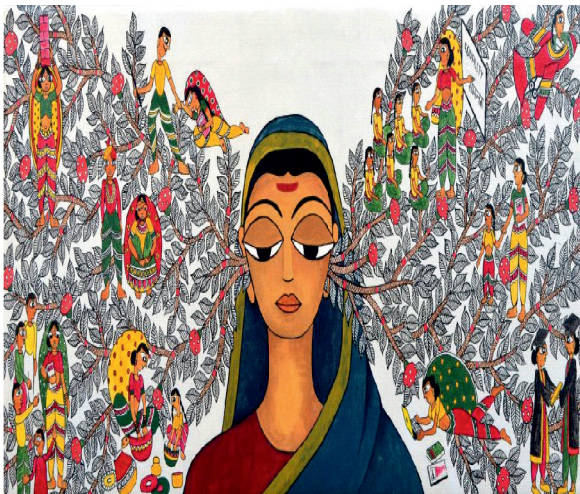


Fig. 3.15: Depiction of Dalit Life

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