



Government of Bihar

# BIHAR BHAWAN

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## Preserving Art in Pandemic



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# contents

<b>Oysters from Mithila in times of Pandemic</b>	<b>1-4</b>
<b>Artisan's Corner</b>	<b>5-7</b>



# Oysters from Mithila in times of Pandemic

Who would have thought the face masks to become the compulsive identity of humans around the world these days, saving millions of lives at a time while the other million is surrendering to the global outbreak of life threatening corona virus.

**The World Health Organization (WHO) says that a thin triple-layered cotton face mask covering our nose and mouth can help prevent spread of the virus and save lives.**

The World Health Organization (WHO) says that a thin triple-layered cotton face mask covering our nose and mouth can help prevent spread of the virus and save lives. Bihar, taking a giant leap, not only adhered to the global health protocol and guidelines issued by the top world health advisory but also contributed in the fight against the pandemic while procuring thousands of handcrafted masks based on Mithila painting, popularly known as Madhubani painting masks.



Around 2500 artisans from the Mithila region of Darbhanga and Madhubani have worked tirelessly to design live-saving masks with Madhubani paintings and making it a big hit on internet amidst a global health crisis. With the collective efforts of the artisans, Government of Bihar, civil society, journalists and common masses, Madhubani masks emerged as a brand and gathered massive eyeballs on online e-commerce shelves carrying huge demand among mixed periphery.

Hundreds of trained artisans carved a niche in the field of Madhubani painting and have also many accolades in the past. The demand of Madhubani masks is growing every day. The ethnic and trendy masks are very high in demand and are ordered from various states of India like Chennai, Delhi, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bengaluru and different districts of Bihar as well. The artisans receive order on WhatsApp, Twitter and phone. This pandemic has given an opportunity to many artisans in Bihar who lost their livelihood because of corona virus as all the fairs and exhibition stayed cancelled due to lockdown.



Madhubani masks provided them an opportunity to magnify their creativity and stay relevant in the times of pandemic.



## **The Big Push by PM Narendra Modi**

In July, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in his monthly radio address on All India Radio lauded the efforts of women self help group for making masks depicting Madhubani paintings. It proved to be a boon for the artisans the cottage industry of masks in Bihar. The artisans admitted that the demand for Madhubani masks grew doubled in just 72 hours after PM Modi's address.



## Ambapali Bihar Emporium

Ambapali Bihar Emporium at Connaught Place in New Delhi catered the demands of masks in the national capital and made those masks easily available for the buyers. The office of the Resident Commissioner, Bihar Bhawan, administers the demands of masks and gets it procured from different districts of Bihar.





**“I engaged 300 families in my village and sold 15 thousand masks via WhatsApp Group”**

**Remant Kumar Mishra**



Remant Kumar Mishra, 38, the famous artisan from Bihar who is now popularly known as the ‘mask man’, might have shot to overnight fame via a Twitter post but the genesis of Remant’s success story goes back in the year 1995 when he was acclaimed with the coveted scholarship awarded by the Union Ministry of Tourism. This scholarship was conferred upon him for his contribution in the field of Mithila paintings. Since then, Remant has been promoting Mithila art not only in India but around the world. Before the global outbreak of Covid-19, he travelled to China, Italy and Mauritius to participate in international exhibitions.

Amidst the nationwide corona lockdown, his Madhubani painting masks went viral on internet as people from different walks of life reposted his artwork.

Journalists, civil society, celebrities and social activists shared the trendy and ethnic looking masks that broke the internet overnight and Remant Kumar came to be known as the mask man. In this first edition of our e-magazine, we interviewed Remant Kumar Mishra about his journey in this diverse field of art and crafts and tried to bring out the story around Mithila masks and traditional Madhubani paintings.



## **How the Madhubani masks went viral on internet?**

Media played a pivotal role in the popularity of Madhubani painting masks. We all were overwhelmed by the response by the regional media channels and newspapers. We have a WhatsApp group where there are many an artisans from the Mithila region who travel places to sell their paintings and participate in various exhibitions. We had planned to participate in art fairs and exhibition but because of the lockdown everything was dropped. Then we thought to produce masks and at the same time also promote the art and craft.

## **How did you manage to reach such a huge chunk of customers?**

In the early phases of the lockdown, we produced masks and propagated the message via our WhatsApp group. Soon the information also reached government officials in the Madhubani district of Bihar. I distributed some of these to them and asked for their feedback. It was very positive. Thereafter, a buyer tweeted the masks made by me and tagged an influential person on internet and rest is the history. The frequency of calls and WhatsApp messages inquiring about the Madhubani masks rose manifold.

I used to receive 7-8 thousand calls a day. Initially it was 20-25 calls. I had to switch off my phone because I was unable to take more orders.

# **INTERVIEW**

## **Who all helped you in the production of masks?**

I traveled almost every household in my village and looked for tailors and artists. They all agreed to support me in the manufacturing of masks. With constant efforts, I managed to club 300 families from my village to produce masks. My prime objective was to make people self-reliant by generating some sort of employment at a local level and make them aware.

## **Why did you keep the prices under 50 rupees each?**

Many fellow artisans questioned my decisions on the lower pricing of the Madhubani masks. They asked me why I kept the prices so low. I always believed that since we were earning nothing because of the lockdown, it would be not very wise to sell masks at higher prices. And above all, these masks are life savers wore by people from all class or stature (Ghareeb ameer sabke liye hai ye mask).

**Please tell us about the designs, patterns and technique.**

We usually paint nature on the Madhubani masks. We primarily use fish, a symbol of good fortune in the Mithila region, on our masks. Fishes are considered good omen in our region. Besides fish, we use colored leaves, cuckoo, parrots, plants etc.

**How many masks have you produced so far?**

We have produced and sold more than 15000 masks with the help of our WhatsApp group.

**How do you send bulk orders?**

The orders are shipped via India post. We also send masks to Canada and USA.

**Do you also travel to participate in painting exhibitions?**

Last year in September, I travelled to Italy to participate in a craft festival. I have been to China four times and also visited Sri Lanka and Mauritius for the same.

**How did the Govt. of Bihar help you promote the Madhubani art?**

Government of Bihar has helped us a lot in getting our work recognized. In 2014, Shri Pratyaya Amrit (IAS), the then CMD of Bihar State

Power Holding Company Limited, helped me a lot in promoting my skills and supporting the artisans like us. I got the opportunity to renovate the cafeteria of head office of Vidyut Bhawan in Patna.

## INTERVIEW

**“In the year 1995, I was conferred with the scholarship awarded by the Union Ministry of Tourism. It was awarded for my contribution in the field of Mithila paintings..”**



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