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Indian Paintings: An Analysis of Geographical and Chronological Context

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ABSTRACT

The development of various genres of painting can be traced back to the beginning of history on the basis of various archeological evidences. Even within the limitations of the materials and techniques in the distant past, the people spread their aesthetic sense and sensibility through wonderful creations. Artists have drawn portraits, combining capacity and expectation together and with the passage of time, it has been expressed inside caves, on temple walls, on floors, on doors, on earthenware, on cloth, etc. Although the paintings of the ancient period were based on various supernatural beliefs, rituals of worship, etc., later on it has been transformed into special aesthetic forms. Initially, totem was developed as a symbol of faith and adherence to various supernatural beings, but later it reflected the diverse geographical locations, environment-nature, and the tastes of the ruling society. In the course of time, the subject of this change has become clear in the art-form of India, as well. The diverse tastes of rulers from different parts of the world, who ruled Indian subcontinent, have also contributed to the rise of Indian art-form. This article on Indian painting attempts to provide a regional and chronological analysis of the material, morphological and characteristic changes in paintings from prehistoric times to contemporary era.

Keywords: Cave paintings, Folk art, Indian paintings, Miniature, Analysis, Raga, and religious structures.

INTRODUCTION:

The basis of ancient Indian art significantly includes the pottery of Harappa-Mohenjo-daro¹, the cave paintings of Ajanta-Ellora² and the statues of Sarnath-Gandhara³, etc. On the other hand, Gods and Goddesses like Shiva, Vishnu, Durga, etc. are the soul of Indian art while Krishna was the heart of Indian painting until the Mughal and British rule. Different literatures on this ground show that, as a result of their arrival, issues of secularism became predominant and geographical differences are noticed. Like, mountain painting and Kangra art⁴ developed in some parts of the foothills of the Himalayas in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. Book drawing was a distinct genre of Raja-

sthan's pictorial style. Mysore style of South India, Tanjur or Thanjavur and Sherial were wrapped arts. Mahbubani painting style and Tibetan style were popular in the eastern part of northern India, especially in Bihar and Nepal. In the Bengal region of eastern India, 'Kalighater Pot'⁵ has been included in the history with its distinctive majority. Mughal miniature paintings developed during the Mughal rule. This style later influenced other Indian styles and created a mixed style. Again, the company style became popular under European influence with the direct inspiration of the rulers. Various genres of paintings in Indian region have developed individually since ancient period of time. Therefore, paintings have revealed the natural,

social, religious, political, economic and cultural aspects of the people of different geographical regions for many centuries.

‘Ancient Hindu art and Jain art began in 526 BC. During Alexander's invasion of India from 326-326 BC, the Gandhara art originated in a combination of Greek and Indian art. Dance scenes based on the story of Nagchampa Jatak in Mathura in the Kushan dynasty from 6 AD to 200 AD, dance scenes engraved on the south and west arches of Sanchi and two special dance scenes in the form of Gandhara art along with other sculptures are the products of this era. 320 AD - 650 AD is the golden age of Indian history. It was the reign of the Gupta dynasty - Samudra Gupta, Second Chandragupta, Vikramaditya, Kumargupta - Skandhagupta and others. Gwalior (Pawaiya) - Dance scene, Deosar - Ramayana dance scene, Central India - Vidyadhar Sarnath - Dance scene, etc. is the achievements of this period. There are also sculptures of many single, dual and group dance scenes. From 540 AD to 650 AD, the Chalukya dynasty developed the famous Ajanta, Ellora painting, architecture, sculpture, dance, music and other arts. The Portuguese, French and English arrived in India in 1575-1657 AD and their influence led to the birth of the Rajput dynasty or the art of miniature painting’⁶ (Mukherjee, 2013).

The first paintings of India are found on the rock of the cave, which is located in Mirzapur in the Vindhya Mountain range of prehistoric times. The largest of the hundreds of ancient cave paintings is located in central India. The largest cave painting drawn on sandstones situated within one hundred miles from the city of Bhopal in present day India. In addition to various magic scenes, there are pictures of weak people and shields and swords drawn in their hands. Some of the images are X-ray images that look like Australian indigenous paintings (Aboriginal Art). In the history of architecture, sculpture and painting, the Gupta age⁷ is called the Golden Age. Gupta-art features are observed in the style of construction of the cave-temples of Ajanta and Ellora. As literature shows,

‘The paintings at the end of the cave in the sandstone hills at Singhanpur village in Raigad district of India are painted in brown red (Burgundy), dark

red, purple, pale yellow lines. In all these caves, people, birds and various animals are drawn in geometric shapes. Some animals such as pigs, elephants and rabbits have been painted in a very realistic style. These have the impression of dynamism. In addition to the large animals, the bison are seen lying on the ground with arrows. The pictures are painted in a very dramatic manner. In this cave there is another painting (Overlapping) on top of each other. One has been painted on another in different eras. All of these paintings date back to the Old Paleolithic Period’⁸ (Alam, 2015).

A variety of natural colors were used in the cave paintings. Some colors were also made from terracotta extract, but pink and orange are more commonly used. Blue, white, yellow and red are also used. The outer lines were given with these colors, which is an addition in the fourth century AD. However, it can be said that there was no use of full color or tone.

‘The Yogimara Cave, located in the Ramgarh Hills in Madhya Pradesh, India, later in the 2nd century BC, is considered to be the oldest cave in the historical period. Paintings of this cave were drawn by the densely contiguous subject. The subject of the photo is: ‘Shots-carts, elephants, some nude people around a tree, injured animals being hunted, etc. It goes without saying that there is not much difference between the caves of the previous era and the subject of this cave painting. Of course, there are aquatic animals painted with all these recurring lines, which are only drawn with red and black lines (Tadey).’⁹

Most paintings took place in the 3rd century BC. Northern India was then in the Iron Age, which extended from the Ganges Basin to the Deccan. During this period, red and black pottery was found, some of which had the owner's own mark painted on them. Mohenjodaro designs match these symbols. Cave paintings are also observed in the art forms of the Dravidian people of South India. However, later many cave paintings became extinct by the period of time. The Ajanta cave paintings were created by Buddhist Shramana¹⁰ about one and a half thousand years ago. It was lost in the dense forest in the passage of time. It was recovered in 1819 by some English officials of the Madras Platoon.

The cave is located at the edge of the village of Ajnta or Ajanta, near the Jalgaon-Auran-gabad highway in Fardpur, Aurangabad district, Maha-rashtra, India. There are about 30 cave pillars carved out of the 250 feet high steep ravine of the Wagorariver in Ajanta. They were built between the 2nd century AD and the 7th century AD. The paintings on the wall of Ajanta tell the story of different stages of Buddha's life.



Fig 1: Ajanta Cave painting.

It is located 30 km from the city of Aurangabad in Maharashtra, India. These religious structures were built between the 5th and 10th centuries. There are 12 temples of Buddhism, 18 temples of Hinduism and 5 temples of Jainism. The Ellora Cave Temple was built during the reigns of Kalachuri, Chalukya and Rashtrakuta (Hossain, 2020).



Fig 2: Ellora Cave painting.

'The kingdom of the mountainous Gul has a rich tradition of painting. Artists worked on Haripur-Gul during the reign of Dilip Singh, but it became a full-fledged genre during the reign of Govardhan Chand. Numerous examples of this style are on display in the Chandigarh Museum. Govardhan Chand's son Bhupchand continued to patronize the artists of this genre. With their help Gul's painting had flourished towards the nineteenth century. Gul's paintings are unique regarding drawing technique and Subjects. Pandit Seo

(Chadhahafar: Jhabam), his two sons Nainsukh and Mankuare notable painters of this genre. The paintings of Gul, a symbol of pure beauty, blue and green were painted here very skillfully'¹¹ (Rashid, 2017).



Fig 3: Ramayana, Gul's painting.

Thanjavur¹² was developed in the Tamil region which is Tanjur painting in English. The practice dates back to the early seventeenth century, when the kings of Vijayanagar patronized classical music, dance and painting. Here one finds images of Hindu mythology, Hindu deities and saints. It is decorated in a simple, multi-colored, intricate sculptural pattern, with bright gold prints and the use of various gemstones. Dakshina, Vijayanagar, Maratha and European styles are similar in Thanjavur's paintings.



Fig 4: Cave paintings, Brihadesvara, Tanjore, Tamilnadu



Fig 5: Cave paintings, Thanjavuror Tanjur painting.

There are also different forms of dance in different paintings in different ages. In addition to the Ajanta-Ellora murals, significant paintings can be found in this context:

Raga-spring dance in Kangra painting style, Rajput miniature paintings depicting Megharag, dance style, In Mughal painting - some graceful poses centered on Malla and Basanta Raga, dance of painting based on Mahajanaka Jataka in Cave No. 1 of Ajanta, and dance instruments of different eras can be found in the Sittanavasal caves in the Deccan through dance paintings, tiger cave paintings, etc ¹³(Mukherjee, 2013).



Fig 6: Meghmalla's Raga (14 century).



Fig 7: Basanta Raga (16 century).

Rajput painting or royal painting was developed at the court of Rajputana. Here the style of Mewar has gained special uniqueness. The painting developed in Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kunti, Kota and Krishgarh. Radha-Krishna is the lifeline of Rajastani painting. This painting is based on their love, and is associated with drama, music and dance.

“Rajasthani art shows all that is best and of universal appeal in the emotional side of the Indian people. Its inspiration is rooted in the peoples’ hearts keeping close to their poetry, music and

drama. Its central theme is love. Love is conceived as the means and symbol of all Union. The lovers represented... always Radha and Krishna typifying the eternal motif of Man and Woman and revealing in every day events the image of the events in heaven (Dept. of Archaeology, India, 1948).

Miniatures are the main features of Rajasthan’s paintings. This style is also widely used in Ramayana epics, murals of palaces and interior paintings of forts. In the last decade of the sixteenth century, paintings like Mewar, Marwar, Hadoti and Dhundhare merged from this style of painting. Devotees of the neo-Vaishnava awakening and devotional movement were inspired by this style of painting. Among them Ramanuja, Mirabai, Tulsidas, Sri Chaitanya, Kabir, Ramananda are notable



Fig 8: Rajastani Mewar Painting, Udaypur (1605 century).



Fig 9: Radha-Krishna, Rajput painting.



Fig 10: Bisnu-Laxmi, Rajput Painting (1678 century).

‘Fadachitra (which is pot in Bengali) is also a popular folk style of Rajasthan. This custom has been practiced in Rajasthan since ancient times. Fad is basically called *Zamin*. This painting is used to tell the story of a local folk deity. Pabuji and Bedalbayan in particular are the two most revered by the fad painters. Those who sing with this Painting are called Bhopa. Bhopa is basically a monk rhymer poet. Those who carry the illustrated fad for a long time walk around and visit the mobile temples of the folk deities. The fad paintings made by Pabuji are usually fifteen feet long, while the fads dedicated to Devnarayan are 30 feet long. Fad is painted with local ingredients, with herbal ingredients. Bhilbar and Shahpur in Rajasthan are famous for this style of painting. Yoshi families continue to practice this culture to this day’¹⁴ (Rashid, 2017).

Among the various genres of paintings here in India subcontinent, Radha-Krishna and Gopiderleela are particularly noteworthy where the name of Rajput painting is most memorable. Rasalila is one of the most ancient and traditional folk-dance dramas of the Brajvashi region. The dance drama 'Brajrasalila' has been performed for almost 400 years. The performance style of this dance drama, dialogues, music, dance, etc. is an in-valuable resource of the ancient tradition. The story of Krishna is also observed in the case of dance. No historical information is available about the early period of the Brajrasalila dance drama. However, the prevalence of Rashnrittya in literature and mythology can be seen from the 4th century AD, i.e., ‘Harivansh’ Anthology. “The dancing in the Raasleela consisted, for the most part, of an extension and amplification of the simple, basic mime and gesture of Kathak or story-tellers combined with elements of whatever folk dancing was then available in the region ”(Khokor, 1979).



Fig 11: Brajer Rashleela.

Madhubani or Mithila painting is famous in Mithila of Nepal and Bihar region of India. The figure features body composition, the use of many nib-pens or brushes, the predominance of natural bright colors and the remarkable arrangement of geometric elements. Madhubani or Mithila paintings are the paintings that Janak Raja arranged in the city on the occasion of Sita's marriage to Rama. Fingers, small branches of trees, brushes, nib-pens, wood were used in this style of painting. As a result, geometric shapes are a feature of this painting. In this painting, various festivals like birth, marriage, Holi, Surya, Shastri, Kali Puja, Unayalam, Durga Puja etc. are painted. Myth and literature are closely associated with the Madhubani art form.

“Madhubani painting was initiated by the women of present day Madhubani and Dharbhanga towns. It started with the practice of painting on muddy walls and decorating the floor of the hut. What’s more, this style is currently painted on cloth, handmade work and canvas. The main ingredient in this style is rice powder. The Madhubani style is distinct for two specific features. One is two-dimensional imagery and the production of colors from special plants ochre and Lamplak. Reddish brown and black colors are made from these plants. Another important feature of painting is the bright colors and the wonderful designs created through dots and lines”¹⁵ (Rashid, 2017).



Fig 12: Ramayana-Modhubani or Mithila Miniature.



Fig 13: Pandulipi of Kurukshetra, Mahabharata.

Mysore painting is a very important genre of Indian classical painting in Karnataka, South India. It started during the reign of Vijayanagar (1338-1575). This art is famous for mixed colors. Its contents revolve around Hindu deities and mythology. The main features of Mysore painting are soft and fine lines, intricate brush strokes, elegant body composition, careful application of herbal colors, radiant hue of gold leaf etc. Here the painting is done in gesso method in which various faces, wear able's, ornaments, etc. are embellished. Gold color is usually used to enhance the brightness of clothes, ornaments, earthenware and deities.



Fig 14: Mysore painting.



Fig 15: Krishner Biswarup, Mysore painting.

Various Buddhist literatures mention that festivals in India were then decorated with paintings. No religious festival would be complete without painting. Potchitra were painted in front of the cave. These were displayed the screens made of bamboos. The word 'Chitrashala' was used repeatedly in ancient Pali and Sanskrit literature. The practice of painting existed among the kings, high-ranking employees, the aristocracy and women. It is also known from the 4th or 3rd century BC 'Vinayapathak' which mentions,

“There were various paintings in the entertainment room of King Prosenjit of Binoypithak. At that time, there were three types of paintings - 'Lepyachitra', meaning 'pot-like paintings on cloth',

'Lekhyachitra' meaning alpna paintings and 'Dhulichitra' meaning paintings using various colored powders. Later, in the culture of the Konisk era, the whole of Indian art, free from foreign influences, was introduced in the art of Amravati and Mathura of that era”¹⁰ (Mukherjee, 2013).

Gautama Buddha once spoke of potchitra in his life-time. He mentioned the name of a type of potchitra called 'Charanachitra'. These potchitrawas painted by folk artists in ancient times, which were called 'Patua'. The history of potchitra in the subcontinent is very ancient. According to some, it is two and a half thousand years old. At that time high class people of the society used to study art. Some of these patterns were also painted on the wall of Ajanta.



Fig 16: Buddhis painting, Nepal (19-20AD).

Medieval miniature paintings - from the sixth to the eighteenth-century Rajasthani and Kangra miniature paintings also depict Radha-Krishna and the Gopis dancing, the subject in which 'Krishna is observed'. Paintings of dancing women are found in royal palaces and gardens. Different styles of dance can be seen in Mughal miniature paintings, Ajanta cave paintings and Egyptian murals.



Fig 17: Odisha Potchitra, Raghurajpur. Pur



Fig 18: Kangra Miniature.



Fig 19: Radha-Krishna and Gopini's in Vrindavan, miniature paintings.

In the present history, Mughal painting occupies a special place in the art of painting in Asia. This art is derived from the Persian Miniature. However, there are local Indian Hindu, Jain and Buddhist influences, which were mainly developed in the Mughal era in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Originally the Mughal emperor Akbar introduced this genre in his ruling period, which is known as the Mughal genre of painting. He combined both Indian indigenous customs and Iran-Arab-centered Islamic civilization. These Mughal miniatures contain many images of royal dance

The art of the Mughals was aristocratic, distinguished by realism, careful and refined craftsmanship, and high intellectual quality. In addition to their historical values, its finest products are aesthetic gems which have elicited the appreciation of the most distinguished art-critics in India and the West (Dept. of Archaeology, India, 1948).

The Nawabs of Lucknow, especially Asaf-ud-Daulah (1775-1798) and Wajid Ali Shah (1848-1857) were great patrons of the art. Due to their enthusiasm and generosity, Luck now was transformed into a prosperous region. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah had due respect

for and appreciation and patronage of all kinds of arts and culture.



Fig 20: Miniature painting of Mughal emperor Akbar.



Fig 21: A Miniature painting of the Mughal court.



Fig 22: Brajer Raslila displayed by the Mughal court.



Fig 23: Miniature paintings in the court of King Shahjahan.

Artists working in the East India Company or other foreign companies introduced this Indo-European painting in the eighteenth century. At that time many paintings were exactly imitated for cheap sale. Aishwarya Prasad of Patna is known as the last person to practice this. This style is developed by assimilating the elements of Rajput tradition and Mughal painting with European perspective, vellum. The common people of Calcutta, Chennai, Delhi, Lakshadweep, Patna, etc., dancers, festivals, landscapes, etc. were painted here. These paintings were painted using European water-colors.



Fig 24: Court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah.

Warli painting is one of the most popular forms of paintings of this region; it is the art of the indigenous people of the North Sahyadri¹⁶ region of India. This painting is an ancient method that has been used for thousands of years in Dahanu, Talasari, Palghar, Moghada and Vikramsadh. This art is more painted on the walls. This 'Monosyllabic' genre has been created based on the observation of nature. For example, the circle comes from the moon-sun; the triangle comes from the mountain and the upper boundary tree. The picture depicts hunting scenes, fishing pictures, farming, dancing, festivals, trees, animals, human and animal bodies with which equality is bound. In most cases, pictures of Tarupa dance are drawn in which a person with a trumpet blows in the center. He is surrounded by the shackles of bondage where men and women create the fabric of society hand in hand. The walls are made of red soil, tree branches and dung. Only white color is used in this painting. The source of white color is rice powder, water and glue. Its brush is made with the tip of bamboo. Indigenous peoples mainly celebrate the harvest, which is reflected in the Warli paintings.

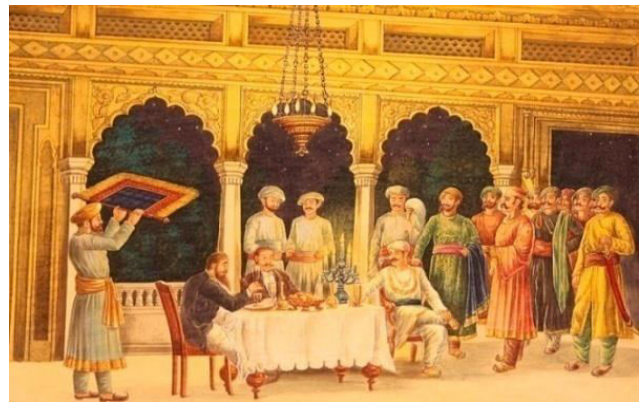


Fig 25: Company painting.



Fig 26: Warli painting.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the New Bengal dynasty was introduced to painting from Calcutta and Santiniketan¹⁷. This work of art was especially associated with the 'Swadeshi movement'¹⁸. The art was developed by Abanindranath Tagore of the Calcutta Tagore family and Ernest Binfield Havel, principal of the Calcutta Government Art College, a British academic. They believed that India's art philosophy should be one that would reflect the mystical qualities of the Indian soul, as opposed to the European bourgeois art style.



Fig 27: Bengali Painting - 'Bharat-Mata', Abanindranath Tagore.

The famous example of such painting is 'Bharat-Mata', where Abanindranath Tagore painted a picture of a woman with four arms which, is of course, associated with the local goddess. Other painters of this genre are Gaganendranath Tagore, Asitkumar Haldar, A. R. Chughtai, Sunayani Devi, Kshitindranath Majumder, Nandalal Basu, Kalipada Ghoshal, Sudhir Khastgir and others.

CONCLUSION:

As per the historical context, during the British rule, art did not attract much importance. The then kings of different regions came forward to patronize arts and artists of this region. Artists were invited to entertain guests of various palaces, even British guests with their artworks. Oil paintings by the artists of the Nineteenth-century are described reported by British magazines, diaries, and other depictions. The kings of Nepal, Rampur, Patiala, Gwalior, Jammu, Kashmir, Mymensingh and Barisal in Bangladesh supported the artists and enriched the art tradition by patronizing them. In the twentieth century, many king's appreciated art and culture, which also inspired many artists. For instance, when Nawab Wajid Ali Shah came to Calcutta after he had been dethroned in 1757, many dancers, musicians, painters and other great personalities also came to Calcutta with him. And gradually, the Zamindars¹⁹ and merchants of Calcutta then came forward to patronize various cultural industries and later on, the conference of Indian classical music, dance, painting, sculpture etc. started from this city. Thus, the changes in painting took place with the change of era. By different period of time, the art of regional features shifted and formed in its distinct glory. From that ancient age, painting has reached to the present-day form through various changes in its material, morphological, and characteristic features. And the study or discussion regarding paintings and other forms for arts of Indian regions reminds this rich chronological history behind the paradigm shifts and concerned region based socio-economic contexts which open the doors of vast study and research in this regard.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The authors, as names are listed, certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or institution or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials stated in this manuscript.

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- 7) Tadev, p. 24.²⁰

ENDNOTES

- ¹Largest cities of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization
- ²Rock-cut temple cave complexes
- ³ Located in Uttar Pradesh, India
- ⁴Pictorial art of Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, India
- ⁵ Originated in West Bengal, India
- ⁶ Translated by the authors from Bangla text
- ⁷Ancient Indian empire existing from the mid-to-late 3rd century CE to 543 CE
- ⁸ Translated by the authors from Bangla text
- ⁹Translated by the authors from Bangla text
- ¹⁰Seeker, one who performs acts of austerity, ascetic
- ¹¹ Translated by the authors from Bangla text
- ¹²Formerly Tanjore, is a city in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu
- ¹³ Translated by the authors from Bangla text
- ¹⁴Translated by the authors from Bangla Text
- ¹⁵ Translated by the authors from Bangla text
- ¹⁶North Sahyadri Range in Maharashtra, India
- ¹⁷A neighborhood of Bolpur, West Bengal, India. It was established by Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, and later expanded by his son Rabindranath Tagore
- ¹⁸A part of the Indian independence movement and contributed to the development of Indian nationalism
- ¹⁹a landowner, especially one who leases his land to tenant farmers

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