



Matsya Region: A Domain of Culture with Special Reference to its Paintings

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ABSTRACT

India inherited a rich culture of art, architecture and sculpture as its heritage since the time of the Vedas. Even in the Pre-Vedic non-Aryan period in the artistic creations of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, the Indian ethos of love for artistic creativity is clearly visible. Rajasthani painting developed in Rajasthan and is considered as a bright chapter in the history of Hindu Miniature Painting of a high standard in north-western India. The paintings of Matsya region have acquired a unique place among Rajasthani paintings. The chieftains of this area gave impetus to this art. The engravings and paintings on ivory, bronze, wood, miniature paintings, hand-made paintings, amorous figures on the walls of palaces, monuments, buildings, museums speaks volumes of this art. The present paper analyses the rich cultural heritage of Rajasthan and in particular of Matsya region.

KEYWORDS: Rajasthan, Painting, Matsya, Culture, Heritage.

India inherited a rich culture of art, architecture and sculpture as its heritage since the time of the Vedas. Even in the Pre-Vedic non-Aryan period in the artistic creations of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, the Indian ethos of love for artistic creativity is clearly visible. In cave no. 10 in Ajanta a large wall painting of a handsome Raja with his retinue under a decorated tree with musicians on one side done in about the first century B.C., possibly the first surviving wall painting, remarkable for its realism, is a living example how the tradition of the art of painting survived. Within the passage of a few centuries, we find painting (Alekhya) which occupies the fourth place among the 64 arts mentioned by Vatsyana in his 'Kamasutra' written in between 200-300 A.D. It was a fully developed art with six limbs (anga) of painting (Shadanga).

The six limbs of painting are:

1. 'Rupa' – means shape of form.
2. 'Pramana' – means direct knowledge of the harmonious division and the measurement of form.
3. 'Bhava' – is the sentimental grace.
4. 'Labanya' – of overt (open) and covert (hidden) beauty of form. It is the direct interaction between heart to heart. It is most essential in six limbs of Indian painting.
5. 'Sadrishtya' means determination of the real form and similarity.
6. 'Varnikabhangam' – means the colour scheme applied in an artistic style whereas use of wrong colours mars the effectiveness of the painting.

In 'Vishnu Dharmattar Purana' Chitra or painting has been given the highest place among art. It is because the appeal of the visual art is direct to the heart and makes the preaching and assimilation of ideas easier. Thus, in ancient period painting was quite a developed art as the cave paintings of Ajanta, Ellora and Bagh bear it out Pala School, Gujarat school, Apbhransh style, Rajasthani School, Mughal School, Pahari School of paintings flourished in this country. From literary evidence besides murals other forms of paintings also existed from early times. Like story teller scrolls, there were done on cloth, wooden boards and other objects which perished leaving no evidence.

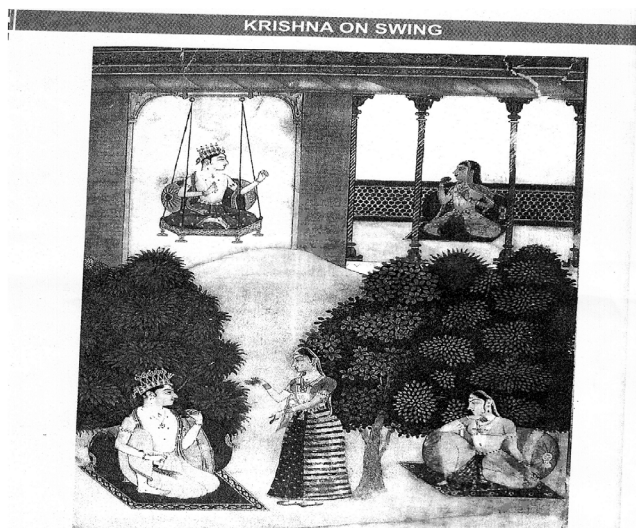
Rajasthani painting developed in Rajasthan and is considered as a bright chapter in the history of Hindu Miniature Painting of a high standard in north-western India. The period of Rajput painting embraces the period of final growth from the latter half of the 16th century to the 19th century. Influenced by the other Indian painting it flourished in the form of many styles and sub styles in Rajasthan. The Rajasthani School was confined around Rajasthan covering the areas of Mewar (later Udaipur), Jaipur, Bundi, Kishangarh, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Alwar. It developed in many ancient cities, capitals, religious and cultural institutions of Rajasthan.

The paintings of Matsya region have acquired a unique place among Rajasthani paintings. The chieftains of this area gave impetus to this art. The engravings and paintings on ivory, bronze, wood, miniature paintings, hand-made paintings, amorous figures on the walls of palaces, monuments, buildings, museums speaks volumes of this art. Two major



factors contributed greatly to the development of paintings in this region, first, the economic prosperity enjoyed by the commercial community of Rajasthan and second the revival of 'Vaisnavism' and growth of Bhakti cult.

In the 14th century the influence of poets and writers like Ramanuja, the worshipper of Lord Vishnu and Jaydev, the worshipper of Lord Krishna brought about great changes in the art, literature and spiritual awakening of the people all over India. The appearance of Sri Chaitanya and Meerabai and their total devotion and love for Lord Krishna swept over the whole of India. Rajasthani paintings in general and Matsya paintings in particular were greatly influenced by the advent of Ramananda, Tulsidas and kabir. It resulted in the expansion of the imaginative horizon of the artists and in the inclusion of subjects related to Sri Ram Charit, Geet Govinda, the divine love of Radha and Krishna, Hara-Parvati, ancient tales, lives of saints, Baramasa or the monthly festivities of the year and Indian Rag-Raginis based on Indian classical music.



The Chieftains of Rajasthan always considered themselves as champions of Hindu faith and culture and guardians of their country. Consequently they had to lead a life of great courage and hardship. Even the women were called upon to sacrifice themselves in 'Jauhar' in order to preserve their chastity. In Bhakti cult, the intense devotion to a personal deity like Sri Rama and Lord Krishna offered them a sense of relief from the tension of this stern life. Krishna specially appealed to their romantic temperament. This love for romance and fantasy is reflected in their choice of the subject-matter of the painting. In the meantime, the precious paintings which once were in the possession of kings and courtiers came down to be possessed by common man also. Their love for romance and fantasy is reflected in the religious themes chosen for illustrations which are scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, works belonging to the Krishna cult of the Geet-Govinda, Bhagvat Puran, and the works of Surdas, Keshavdas and Beharilal. The Geet Govinda written by the Bengali court poet Jaydev in 12th century, was a favourite

of Rajasthani painter because it deals with the romantic exploits of Radha and Krishna in a pastoral setting. The love between them is allegorical representing the union of human soul with God.

The pre-pondering theme in these illustrations is love in all its form treated in variety of ways, as in 'Nayak-Nayika Bheda' (Classification of heroes-heroines) folk-lore and ballads (from such literary works as the Dhola-Maru, Sohni-Mahiwal, Laur-chand or chandayana, a popular north Indian ballad by Daud Maulana) Sanskrit classics like Kadambari by Banbhata, Rasikpriya, Ramchandrika and the love episode of chaur-Panchasika, Nala-Damayanti were illustrated. These are the illustration of genre type painting in Matsya School of paintings. All these changes in the approach to Rajasthani and Matsya painting were direct result of the 14th century cultural renaissance that swept over the whole of central and North-Western India.

The special style of the Rajasthani painting shows a primitive vigour, bold outlines and brilliant colors set in a harmonious pattern. Regional features in the depiction of facial types, local scenery and technical details can be found in different sub-schools.

Matsya painting, like Indian Literature, is the symbolic expression of a multiple aesthetic sentiments of Indian life, its nature and daily activities and sudden flashes of emotional thought is a unique feature of Matsya School of paintings.

The use of different colors to express different thought is very clear in this style. The artists reveal an unusual understanding of colour harmony. Colors carry for them distinct meaning as red depicts warm, emotion and fury, yellow the marvelous, brown the erotic. Colors are also used to represent specific musical modes which constitute a special feature of Indian Art in the Ragmala paintings. There is a special position in the series of Ragmala painting, bright color and bold outlines are its salient feature. Paintings are left to the imagination and emotion of the viewers for interpretation. They are economical in choosing the subject-matter, but very expressive. These paintings are two-dimensional with simplification of lines and flat colour schemes with presentation of all figures in same dimension in complete disregard of perspective. The use of bright red, blue, yellow and green colors gave it a contrasting brilliance.

In this style generally, when the artists painted the figure of a woman, the same figure would be duplicated for other woman in the painting as symbol of all femininity. All would have large lotus eyes, flowing tresses, firm breasts, slender waists and rosy hands.

Soon after, the Matsya School of painting came in close contact with Mughal School of painting and contact with Mughal court was inevitable. But it is an established fact that at no time the proud Rajput would yield in spirit to foreign masters. A sophisticated court style was too foreign to appeal to the Rajput taste. The native artists borrowed a few basic

technical elements of composition and rhythmic outline and used them to revitalize their bold and independent artistic creation. Their paintings reflect the love for life, their delight in nature and their romance and fantasy. In glowing colors and highly decorative designs with competent technique, they depicted the mischievous pranks of the cowherd Krishna and the entrancing love of Radha and other legendary episodes of devotion and courage so dear to the proud hearts of the Rajput noble men and peasants alike.

The nomenclature Rajasthani painting or Matsya painting is not given to any rootless set of painting that grew indigenously at any one place, but is a concerted effort by group of master painters to develop this new type of painting where Western Indian painting, Jain Manuscript painting and Gujarat style were all fused together to give rise to this new genre of painting. The centre where these activities and experiments were carried through was Mewar which was least affected by a series of Mughal attack and painters were left in peace to develop their own style.

Mewar paintings had great impact on Matsya School of paintings. The largest number of painting in this style is centered on Krishna Bhakti cult. Social and cultural life of people is also revealed in flashes. The customs prevailing at that period, village life, scene from Rajput court, marriage procession, songs and dances inner life of the palaces and the battle scenes have been painted by him. The painters frequently used red, orange, green, bright blue (Lapis-la-Zuli) colours. The background is of flat colour, use of contrasting colour in figures adds glamour to the entire painting. In these paintings, male and female figures have long noses, oval shaped faces, elongated fish-like eyes. The female figures have been drawn relatively smaller than the male. The males use loose fitting garments embroidered Patka and Turbans and the females use loose long skirts, choli and transparent odhnis (Veils).

In the paintings of birds and animals, ancient Apabhramsa style has been used, which in the later painting specially in drawings of horses and elephants show somewhat natural under the influence of Mughal painting Trees are ornamental, flowers have been drawn in bunches. Hills and Mountains have been depicted in Persian style and waves in the water have been drawn in the basket pattern of Apabhramsa style. There has been little use of perspective. Great emphasis has been laid on the incidents shown in the paintings.

Many high quality paintings were produced in the mid 17th century. Human figures usually have a redish-brown complexion and the women with pinched waist, prominent nose and almond shaped eyes, wear veils, choli and ghagra in Indian fashion while the men wear muslim type kurta over churidar pyjamas and a Mughal type turban. The illustration for the Bhagvat Puran, a well-knit design in composition in about 1640 provides an excellent example of the style in early stage of its maturity.

The mural decoration on the Rajgarh fort Bharatpur fort is noteworthy. Dataram was the court painter. The walls are studded with coloured glittering stones. Human figures are painted on the walls of the forts. Amorous figures, figures of women stretching her hands performing 'shringaer' (make-up) are painted exquisitely. The walls are decorated with enchanting scenes depicting numerous incidents such as hunting scenes and royal procession. The cenotaph of Musi Maharani is a remarkable example of the profusion of Mughal and Rajput style. There was preference for rhythmic lines and jewel like colour composition. The Mughal influence persisted in portraying graceful and romantic figures of the women, silhouetted against the dark back ground on the palaces, buildings and monuments. The ladies present a picture of charming, simplicity playing either with buds or flying kites. Stories from 'Shivpuran', 'Nalacharita', 'Durgacharita', and 'Panchtantra' were profusely illustrated.



राजगढ़ दुर्ग के मिति चित्र : शृंगार करती हुई नायिका ।

The paintings commonly show architecture and dresses prevalent in Jahangir style. Paintings of nature are symbolis and poetic. Huntings scenes, court scenes, yoga scenes from koran and Badre Munir were popular themes of this school. Portraits of Kings, Emperors, and saints have also been beautifully painted by the painters of Matsya region. Both miniature and wall paintings are done widely. The proper use of colour and beautiful line drawing gave these paintings a distinction.

The impact of Jodhpur, Mewar, Kishangarh, Bundi and Jaipur style is clearly visible in the paintings of the states surrounding Jaipur.



महफिल दीवानजी की : दीवानजी की हूवेली का एक भित्ति चित्र ।

Like Mughal paintings, paintings of Matsya region have ornamented border. Light and shade has been beautifully done in this school like the style of Mughal School. Though it was dominated by the Mughal School of painting, but in the painting of the later period, Rajasthani style predominated.

Total space in the painting has been divided by the use of colours in different steps. Ragmala paintings are a distinct feature of Rajput mainiature paintings. These are pictorial representation of Indian Ragas and Raginis. The mode and time of Raga is expressed through brilliant colours and colorfully dressed Nayak and Nayikas. There are usually dressed in contemporary royal fashion.

Modern style of paintings are also flourishing in this region. Various new artists and painters are working on new themes depicting a profusion of European style with traditional art. Modern themes vary from traditional themes, use of colour, background and outlines shows the predominance of foreign style.

The chief feature of Matsya style of painting lies in its artistic fervor, emotional tresses, profundity. It reveals the high artistic taste of the Rajput chieftains of this region. The various artefact exhibit the invincible grandeur of Matsya region. It is a place where art and culture has reached its culminating point.

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