Art & Culture

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Indian Paintings

The tradition of paintings has been carried on in the Indian subcontinent since the ancient times. With time, Indian classical paintings evolved to become a sort of blend of the various traditions influencing them. Indian paintings provide on aesthetic continuum that extends from the early civilization to the present day. In the beginning, Indian painting was essentially religious in purpose. But as year passed by Indian painting became a fusion of various culture and traditions. During the colonial era, Western influences started to make an impact on Indian art. By the time of Independence in 1947, several schools of art in India provided access to modern techniques and ideas. Galleries were established to showcase these artists. Indian Art got a boost with the economic liberalization of the country since early 1990s. Artists from various fields now started bringing in varied styles of work. Post liberalization, Indian art thus works not only within the confines to academic traditions but also outside it.

Principles of Painting

Around the 1st century BC the Shadanga or Six Limbs of Indian Painting, were evolved, a series of canons laying down the main principles of the art. Vatsyayana, who lived during the third century A.D., enumerates these in his Kamasutra having extracted them from still more ancient works. These 'Six Limbs' have been translated as follows:

1. **Rupabhedha** - The knowledge of appearances.
2. **Pramanam** - Correct perception, measure and structure.
3. **Bhava** - Action of feelings on forms.
4. **Lavanya Yojanam** - Infusion of grace, artistic representation.
5. **Sadrisyam** - Similitude.
6. **Varnikabhanga** - Artistic manner of using the brush and colours.

The subsequent development of painting indicates that these 'Six Limbs' were put into practice by Indian artists, and are the basic principles on which their art was founded.

Pre Historic Paintings

Pre historic paintings were generally executed on rocks and these rock engravings were called Petroglyphs. Indian Cave Paintings are regarded as the earliest evidences of Indian paintings that are made on cave walls. Bhimbetka is a place in the state of Madhya Pradesh where prehistoric paintings are discovered in numerous caves. The paintings span a period of 600 years starting from upper Palaeolithic to early historic and medieval times.

Upper Paleolithic Period

- Paintings are linear representations, in green and dark red, of huge animal figures, such as Bisons, Tigers, Elephants, Rhinos and Boars beside stick-like human figures.
- Mostly they are filled with geometric patterns.
- Green paintings are of dances and red ones of hunters.

Mesolithic period

- The largest number of paintings belongs to this period.
- Themes multiply but the paintings are small in size.
- Hunting scenes predominate
- Hunters in groups armed with barbed spears, pointed sticks, arrows and bows.
• Trap and snares used to catch animals can be seen in some paintings.
• Mesolithic people loved to point animals.
• In some pictures, animals are chasing men and in others they are being chased by hunter men.
• Animals painted in naturalistic style and humans were depicted in a stylistic manner.
• Women are painted both in nude and clothed.
• Young and old equally find places in paintings.
• Community dances provide a common theme.
• Sort of family life can be seen in some paintings (woman, man and children).

Chalcolithic Period Art
• Copper age art.
• The paintings of this period reveal the association, contact and mutual exchange of requirements of the cave dwellers of this area with settled agricultural communities of the Malwa Plateau.
• Pottery and metal tools can be seen in paintings.
• Similarities with rock paintings: Common motifs (designs/patterns like cross hatched squares, lattices etc)
• Difference with rock paintings: Vividness and vitality of older periods disappear from these paintings.

Classification of Indian Paintings
Indian paintings can be broadly classified as murals and miniatures. Murals are large works executed on the walls of solid structures, as in the Ajanta Caves and the Kailashnath temple. Miniature paintings are executed on a very small scale for books or albums on perishable material such as paper and cloth.

Mural Paintings
The history of Indian murals starts in ancient and early medieval times, from the 2nd century BC to 8th – 10th century AD. There are known more than 20 locations around India containing murals from this period, mainly natural caves and rock-cut chambers. The highest achievements of this time are the caves of Ajanta, Bagh, Sittanavasal, Armamalai Cave (Tamil Nadu), Ravan Chhaya rock shelter, Kailasanatha temple in Ellora Caves.

Technique of Mural Paintings
• The technique and process of making Indian wall paintings has been discussed in a special chapter of the Vishnuhraramotaram, a Sanskrit text of the 5th/6th century A.D.
• Most of the colours were locally available. Brushes were made up from the hair of animals, such as goat, camel, mongoose, etc.
• The ground was coated with an exceedingly thin layer of lime plaster over which paintings were drawn in water colours. In true fresco method the paintings are done when the surface wall is still wet so that the pigments go deep inside the wall surface.
• The other method of painting is known as tempora or fresco-secco. It is a method of painting on the lime plastered surface which has been allowed to dry first and then drenched with fresh lime water. On the surface thus obtained the artist proceeded to sketch out his composition. This first sketch was drawn by an experienced hand and subsequently corrected in many places with a strong black or deep brown line when the final drawing was added.

Ajanta Cave Paintings
• The Ajanta Caves carved out of volcanic rock in the Maharashtra Plateau, situated near Aurangabad in Maharashtra.
• Inside many of the caves are frescoes. Frescoes are paintings which are done on wet plaster in which colours become fixed as the plaster dries.
• They are found on the walls and ceilings at Ajanta.

• The paintings reflect different phases of Indian culture from Buddha's birth to his Mahaparinirvana in the 8th century AD.
• Natural colours like white, green, brown, yellow, black, and a wonderful colour of blue is found.
• The human & animal forms show a variety of graceful poses. Various methods were used to create the illusion of depth.
• The place was not far off from the ancient trade routes & attracted traders & pilgrims through whom the Ajanta art style diffused as far as China & Japan.
Ellora Cave Paintings
- The mural paintings in Ellora are found in five caves, mostly limited to Kailasha temple.
- The paintings were done in two series - the first, at the time of carving the caves & the subsequent series was done several centuries later. The earlier paintings show Vishnu & Lakshmi borne through the clouds by Garuda, with clouds in the background.
- In the subsequent series, the main composition is that of a procession of Saiva holy men. The flying Apsaras are graceful. Very few murals in the Jain temples are well preserved.
- The sinewy figures have sharp features & pointed noses. The protruding eye typical of the later Gujarathi style appears for the first time in Ellora.

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<td>Near Aurangabad district of Maharashtra</td>
<td>North West of Aurangabad district of Maharashtra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Constructed between 2nd Century BC to 6th Century AD</td>
<td>Constructed between 6th Century AD to 10th Century AD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of caves</td>
<td>30 caves with one incomplete so sometimes considered 29, 4 chaityas and rest viharas.</td>
<td>100 caves with 34 open for public. Caves dedicated to Hinduism are more followed by Buddhist caves. Cave 10 is the only Chaitya while rest are viharas.</td>
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<td>Religions</td>
<td>Entirely Buddhism</td>
<td>Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism</td>
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<td>Paintings, architecture and sculptures</td>
<td>Architecture and sculptures. Especially the Kailashnath temple.</td>
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Bagh Cave Paintings
- Situated in Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh.
- Buddhist in inspiration.
- Paintings are both secular and religious.
- Influenced by Ajanta style of paintings.
- Most beautiful one is that of Avalokiteshvara Padmapani.
- Strong resemblance to the frescoes of Sigiriya in Sri Lanka.

Sittanavasal Cave Paintings
- Here paintings are connected with JAINA theme.
- The ceilings have depiction of a lotus tank with natural looking images of men, animals, flowers, birds and fishes representing the Samavasarana faith of Jainism.
- The pillars are also carved with dancing girl and the king and the queen.
- Enjoy the same norm and technique as that of Ajanta.
- Most paintings are made in Pandyan period - 7th century AD.

Lepakshi Paintings
- Located in Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh.
- Beautiful paintings of Vijayanagar period.
- Provides glimpses of contemporary dress like tall headwear (Kulavi), colored and embroidered sarees of both men and women in the paintings.
- Earth tones and complete absence of blue color in their painting.
- Costumes are outlined in black.

Badami Cave Paintings
- Earliest Brahmanical paintings so far known, belonging to 6th century A.D.
- The technique follows that of Ajanta and Bagh, the modelling is much more sensitive in texture and expression and the outline soft and elastic.

Miniature Paintings
- Miniature Paintings were complex, colorful, and small in size, with delicate brushwork. The history of Indian Miniature paintings has started in 6-7th century. Miniature Painting was drawn to convey reality.
- The different schools of Indian miniatures are the Pala, Orissa, Jain, Mughal, Rajasthani etc.

Techniques of Miniature Paintings
- Paintings were executed in the traditional tempera technique. Several preconditions need to be fulfilled for making Miniature paintings.
- The painting shouldn’t be larger than 25 square inch.

- The subject of the painting should be painted in not more than 1/6th of the actual size.
- In these paintings there are very few human characters with front face are seen. Most of the human characters are seen with side profile. Big eyes, pointed nose and slim waist are the features of these paintings. The skin colours of human being are Brown and fair. The skin colour of the Lord Krishna is Blue. The colour of the hair and eyes is black. Women characters have long hair. Men and women wear the traditional Indian dress, slippers and shoes. Men wear turbans on their head.
- Mostly Natural colours have been used in these paintings. Black, red, white, brown, blue, and yellow colours are used to decorate the paintings.
Pala School

- The Pala School of painting produced some of the earliest examples of miniature painting in India. This school of painting dates back to 7th to 11th century.
- It was executed under the Palas of Bengal in the eastern India. This period witnessed the last great phase of Buddhism and of the Buddhist art in India.
- The Pala painting is characterised by sinuous line and subdued tones of colour. It is a naturalistic style which resembles the ideal forms of contemporary bronze and stone sculpture, and reflects some feeling of the classical art of Ajanta.
- Here mostly the Palm leaf and paper were used.

Apabhramsa School of Art

- It is the counter part of Pala School which developed in Western India. This school is divided into two phases,
  1. Illustrations made on palm leaf
  2. Illustrations made on paper
- Among Apabhramsa school’s painting best paintings are of transition period when base was changed from palm leaf to paper (1350-1450 A.D.).

Unique feature
Figure paintings have three forth profile with pointed nose, eyes protruding out of facial line, abundance of accessory details and careful ornamentation. Subject matter depicted in three fold in Jains and later in Vaishnav paintings like Gita Govinda.

Western Indian School (12th to 16th century AD)

- The Western Indian style of painting prevailed in the region comprising Gujarat, Rajasthan and Malwa.
- The motivating force for the artistic activity in Western India was Jainism.
- The illustrations on these manuscripts are in a style of vigorous distortion. One finds in this style an exaggeration of certain physical traits like the eyes and hips are enlarged.
- Figures are flat, with angularity of features and the further eye protruding into space. This is an art of primitive vitality, vigorous line and forceful colours.
- From about 1100 to 1400 A.D., palm-leaf was used for the manuscripts and later on paper was introduced for the purpose.

Miniature Art during Delhi Sultanate

- The Delhi Sultanate developed an Indo-Persian style of painting that drew heavily from schools in Iran and Jain paintings.
- Most Sultanate painting dates between about 1450 and 1550, and the centers of production seem to be primarily Mandu in central India and Jaunpur in eastern India, with some work being done in the Delhi region and in Gujarat in western India.
• Features of Delhi Sultanate paintings that are based on Indian traditions include groups of people standing in rows and identical poses, narrow bands of decoration running across the width of the painting, and bright and unusual colors.

• A remarkable manuscript called the Ni’imat Nama, painted in Mandu in central India around 1500, is a book of recipes, which shows the sultan surrounded by attendants preparing foods, medicines, and aphrodisiacs. The painters of the pictures were Indian, but they drew heavily from Shirazi models, with much use of thick green swards, pastel background colors, and provincial Persian figural types.

• The paintings of the Delhi Sultanate represent a period of inventiveness that set the stage for the development of the Mughal and Rajput schools of art, which thrived from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

Mughal Era Miniature Painting
The Mughal emperors introduced their own style of painting with Persian inspiration and added new themes, colours and forms. Court scenes were depicted in grandeur. The background was usually hilly landscapes. Flowers and animals were also vastly depicted.

The Mughal paintings are characterized by their subtleness and naturalism and often depict historical events or court life.

• Portraiture was a rarity and female portraits yet greater. Well packed composition, well proportioned physiognomy and beautifully rounded faces, depiction of motion and a highly populated canvas characterised the art style of this early phase.

Jahangir
• The art of post-Akbar era did not have the illustrative thrust. The earlier boldness was replaced by a touch of softness. The earlier crowded canvas had now a lot of breathing space.

• Jahangir’s poetic genius endowed with fine imagery and lyricism reflected in the art of his era.

• Portraits of birds and animals in this era are timeless world classics.

• His interaction with European world brought the European technique of shading and producing three dimensional effects to Indian painting.

Shah Jahan
• Shahjahan continued Mughals’ art cult, though with lesser thrust.

• Romantic in temperament, Shahjahan, little liked violence and ugliness.

• Portraits and random themes like durbar scenes, processions, festivals, scenes of outings etc were referred.

Aurangzeb
• Aurangzeb being a conservative Muslim had no place for art in his court.

• After he died several Mughal governors and Rajput state acclaimed sovereignty.

• Painters of the Mughal court sought refuge in these states. They carried with them the Mughal art-style which was amalgamated with the taste and likings of their new patrons and local elements.

• This amalgamation created a new art-style widely known as Provincial Mughal. Awadh became the foremost seat of the Provincial Mughal art.

Rajput Paintings
• The Rajput paintings flourished under the patronage of the Hindu Rajput rulers of Rajputana and Punjab Himalayas during the period 1500 AD to the middle of the 19th century.