

Medieval Paintings

India has a rich tradition of painting, with its earliest forms appearing as mural paintings in ancient times. These mural paintings originated from the cave paintings of Bhimbetka and continued to flourish in Ajanta, Bagh, Badami, and Ellora.

There is a common belief that Indian painting declined after Ellora, only to resurface during the Mughal period. However, recent research has challenged this notion. In reality, painting did not decline after Ellora. Instead, the significance of mural paintings diminished, giving way to the rise of miniature painting. The Jains played a pivotal role in the development of miniature painting, creating exquisite artworks on Tal Patras (palm leaf manuscripts) with diverse backgrounds. This Jain influence can also be observed in Pala paintings.

The impact of Jain painting extended to the Gujarati style as well. Early Jain paintings were predominantly created on Tala Patra (palm leaf manuscripts), but with the introduction of paper in India, paintings began to be done on paper. Gujarati paintings depicted various aspects of nature, such as clouds, sky, and sea. The influence of Gujarati paintings then permeated into Rajput art. Paintings of diverse themes, including the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Raag Mala, and Barahmasa, were executed in the Rajput era painting style. During this period, the ChauraPanchasika style emerged, inspired by Bilhan's book of the same name. It combined storytelling with pictorial illustrations and served as a notable influence on pothi style paintings, which refers to manuscript paintings. Moreover, the ChauraPanchasika style also left a lasting impact on Mughal paintings. The Mughal rulers commissioned large-scale manuscript paintings, featuring the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Panchatantra, the story

of Nal Damayanti, and more. Gujarat contributed significantly to Mughal paintings, with seven out of 17 painters in Akbar's court hailing from the region.

Sultanate Paintings

Initially, it was believed that the depiction of living beings in paintings was forbidden in Islam, leading to a lack of artistic development during the Sultanate period. However, recent research has dispelled this belief, proving that mural paintings did exist during this era and that books were also adorned with pictures.

For instance, historical evidence reveals that when Iltutmish welcomed the messenger of the Caliph, he constructed an entrance gate embellished with images of living beings. Similarly, it is said that Mubarakshah Khilji, the successor of Alauddin Khilji, erected tents adorned with various types of pictures. Additionally, there are accounts of Firoz Shah Tughlaq, who adhered to the principles of Islam, destroying some paintings. This indicates that mural painting was indeed prevalent during that period.

- **Chaurapanchasika or Laur Chanda Paintings**

Over time, the continuous transformations witnessed in Jain and Islamic manuscripts culminated in the emergence of a distinct painting style known as Chaurapanchashika or Laur Chanda. This style is substantiated by a group of manuscripts that feature miniature paintings executed in a calm and refined manner, characterized by vivid and vibrant color schemes, as well as the inclusion of bells and ornaments.





The illustrations found in the Chaura Panchashika manuscripts display a notable degree of variation, with certain features present in some manuscripts but absent in others. For instance, the Laur Chanda manuscript, housed in the Prince of Wales Museum in London and the John Rylands Library in Manchester, exhibits a refined level of painting not seen in contemporary manuscripts. Similarly, within the same museum, the Laur Chanda collection and the Aranya Parva and ChauraPanchasika manuscripts of the Mahabharata from 1516 AD showcase stylistic similarities.

The Chaurapanchasika paintings known as Mahapurusha, made in the early days of the Mughal period in the Delhi region, are particularly intriguing. These miniatures embody a style that kept alive the Jain tradition of the latter half of the 15th century. However, the absence of chronological markers on such manuscripts makes it challenging to determine their exact dates. Some paintings within the Chaurapanchasika style depict a pentagonal emblem, which serves as a clue for establishing chronology. Given that the early Akbari era prominently featured the depiction of this emblem, it is believed that some of the Chaurapanchasika paintings may belong to that period.

Regarding the geographical origin of the Chaurapanchasika paintings group, scholars offer differing opinions. Some suggest that the entire group is associated with the North Indian region spanning from Delhi to Jaunpur, while others propose Mewar or Malwa as the heritage regions where favorable cultural, economic, religious, and political conditions fostered the development of this distinctive painting form.

In the miniature paintings of the ChauraPanchasika style, a predominant red background is generally depicted, with occasional use of blue, green, and yellow backgrounds. These paintings share a simplicity like to Jain paintings, featuring female figures with slender waists, sharp noses, large eyes, and square faces, expressing various emotional expressions. The artwork portrays scenes of vibrant life with abundant vegetation, leafy rocks, and a distinctive blue aura, distinguishing them from religious paintings of the late 15th century. As a result, it is believed that the ChauraPanchasika paintings deviated from traditional subject matter and established conventions. Furthermore, the inclusion of popular themes such as Krishna Gatha, Raga Mala, or Mrigavati in these miniatures opened new doors of artistic expression and greatly contributed to the origin and development of the Rajasthani painting style.

Practice Question: Discuss the Caurapancasika and Jain styles of paintings. Can the Caurapancasika style truly be called the precursor of pothi format? [UPSC-2012]

Mughal Paintings

The Mughal period witnessed various forms of paintings-

- 1. Mural painting:** During Akbar's reign, Hindu and Muslim painters adorned the walls of Fatehpur Sikri with exquisite paintings.
- 2. Manuscript painting:** This form involved creating illustrations for various texts, such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Nal-Damayanti's story, and Panchatantra.
- 3. Image painting:** Influenced by the European Renaissance, image painting was introduced to India by the Portuguese during Akbar's time.

Another technical innovation influenced by Europe, this technique involved portraying near objects larger and distant objects smaller on the same surface. This technique was known as Technique of foreshortening.

■ Humayun Period Paintings

The history of Mughal painting finds its roots with Humayun, as Babur had limited time for painting pursuits. Upon his return from the court of the Iranian ruler Shah Tahmasp I, Humayun brought along two renowned painters - Mir Syed Ali and Khwaja Abdul Samad. These talented artists were disciples of Wahzad and played a crucial role in portraying the Khandan-e-Timuriyah.

■ Akbar Paintings

During Akbar's reign, painting flourished alongside the art of architecture, and he himself was a great patron of the arts. According to Abul Fazl, Akbar's picture gallery boasted 17 talented painters, with Daswant being the foremost among them. Painting in the Mughal period was a collective effort, with different painters contributing to different parts of the same painting. Akbar challenged the notion that painting was contrary to the essence of Islam, instead recognizing the painter's ability to appreciate God's creation. Although a painter could create lifelike images, they were aware of their limitations in giving life to their artwork. Akbar fostered a harmonious blend of Iranian and Indian painting styles, and during his reign, Indian elements exerted a stronger influence on Mughal paintings.

■ Points of Difference in Iranian and Indian Paintings

1. Iranian painting placed special emphasis on depicting subjects like hunting and war, whereas Indian painting focused primarily on religious themes.
2. The texture of Iranian paintings was created using broad brushes, while round brushes were preferred for Indian paintings. Additionally, Indian paintings made abundant use of deep blue and red colors.

■ Jahangir Paintings

Jahangir had a personal passion for painting and would often claim that he could identify the

work of different artists within a single picture. In his court, there were several notable painters, including Abul Hasan, Ustad Mansoor, and Vishan Das. Ustad Mansoor excelled in portraying animals and birds, while Vishan Das was sent by Jahangir to the court of Iran. There, Vishan Das obtained portraits of the Shah of Iran and his nobles, which he brought back to Jahangir's court.

Features of Jahangir's Paintings-

1. During Jahangir's reign, there was a decline in the importance of manuscript paintings while the significance of portrayal painting increased.
2. The focus of painting shifted towards the depiction of nature, animals, and birds under Jahangir's patronage.
3. Painting became a means to showcase the royalty, as the Mughal emperor was portrayed with an aura, symbolizing their divinity.
4. One notable technical development during Jahangir's era was the introduction of decorated margins in portrayal painting. These margins featured intricate pictures of flowers, leaves, and other decorative elements.
5. European art had a profound influence on Mughal painting during Jahangir's time. Elements such as paintings of Mary, Jesus, winged angels, and dramatic thunder clouds were incorporated, although oil painting was not prevalent in Mughal art.

■ Paintings During Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb

During Shah Jahan's reign, there was a noticeable decline in Mughal paintings. Rather than focusing on originality in the painting process, greater importance was given to ornamentation and decoration.

Aurangzeb, in his strict adherence to Islamic principles, went as far as banning painting, considering it to be contrary to Islamic

beliefs. Despite this decline and the restrictive measures, Mughal painting continued to exert its influence on various regional art styles.

■ Regional Styles of Paintings

- **Rajasthani Paintings:** Rajasthani paintings have a rich history that became more prominent during the 15th century. It placed a special emphasis on depicting nature, animals, birds, and other subjects. Major religious texts were also illustrated, including the famous ragamala paintings. The influence of Mughal Paintings can be observed in Rajasthani paintings as well. After the decline of the Mughal Empire, various regional styles of Rajasthani style flourished, such as the Mewar style, Amber-Jaipur style, Bundi-Kota style, and Bikaner style.

- **Kishangarh Style:** The Kishangarh style, developed in Rajasthan and its surrounding areas, was founded by Samant Singh, a notable scholar and aesthete. He held a deep interest in Krishna Bhakti (devotion to Lord Krishna). The Kishangarh style placed special emphasis on portraying heroines (Nayika), with a focus on presenting different expressions and gestures in the relationship between Krishna and Radha.

- **Mithila or Madhubani Style:** The Mithila or Madhubani style encompassed two main types of paintings: mural painting and Aripan (floor paintings). Mural paintings involved decorating the walls of houses of Kohbar (nuptial chamber) with paintings. Religious themes were depicted in mural paintings, while non-religious paintings adorned the Kohbar (nuptial chamber). On the other hand, Aripan (floor painting) involves drawing pictures using water or making designs with rice paste. These pictures were typically made in courtyards or in front of door frames.

- **Manjusha Style:** The Manjusha style depicted stories of Bihula-vivahari, which were popular in the folk tales of the Bhagalpur region. This unique style involved creating wooden temple-like structures called Manjusha, while the paintings related to the tales of Bihula-vivahari were made by the brush.

- **Deccan Style:** Bijapur served as the main center of the Deccan style, although it also extended to Golconda and Ahmednagar. This style featured special paintings of Ragamala. Prominent patrons of this style included Ali Shah of Bijapur and his successor Ibrahim Shah. Early paintings of this style showed a clear influence of Persian art, and the costumes were influenced by the North Indian (especially Malwa) style.

- **Gujarat Style:** The Gujarat style, also known as the Gurjar or Gujarat style of painting, depicts various elements such as mountains, rivers, oceans, earth, fire, clouds, horizon, and trees. Paintings in this style were found in regions like Marwar, Ahmedabad, Malwa, Jaunpur, Awadh, Punjab, Nepal, West-Bengal, Odisha, and Myanmar, indicating its widespread influence. Ragamala pictures were also created in this style, and it had an impact on the paintings of Mughal Emperor Akbar's time. Dr. Anand Kumar Swami is credited with bringing this art style to prominence.

- **Rajput Style:** During the decline of the Mughal period, several Rajput states emerged in different regions of India, including notable ones like Mewar, Bundi, and Malwa. Each state developed its distinctive style of painting, which shared some common features and came to be known as the Rajput style. Although this style appeared to have ancient roots, its true form emerged in the 15th century. The Rajput style was influenced by the royal courts, with significant contributions from Kannauj, Bundelkhand, and Chandel kings.

- **Mewar Style:** The Mewar style of paintings depicts Rajasthani life and religion. Historian Taraknath attributed its founding to the renowned painter Sharangdhar in the 7th century, although his contemporary paintings are not available. Paintings made for the Rajmala in the 16th century, during Maharana Pratap's reign in the capital Chabad, showcased the influence of folk art and the forms of the Mewar style. The museum in Delhi preserves the Ragmala Chitravali.

- **Jaipur Style:** The Jaipur style thrived from 1600 to 1900 AD. Many paintings in this style took the form of murals in Shekhawati during the 18th century. Additionally, Mural paintings in this style were found in places like Sikar, Nawalgarh, Ramgarh, Mukundgarh, and Jhunjhunu. The Jaipur style of paintings beautifully combined devotion and adornment. It depicted various subjects such as Krishna Leela, Raga-Ragini, Rasleela, and impressive scenes of elephant hunting and fighting.

- **Bikaner Style:** The Bikaner style, which is related to the Marwar style, reached its peak during the reign of Anoop Singh. Notable artists of the Rajput style, such as Rayalal, Ali Raza, and Hasan Raza, emerged from this region. The influence of the Punjabi style can also be observed in Bikaner paintings, as the Bikaner region is situated near Punjab in the north.

- **Malwa Style:** The Malwa school of paintings focused on architectural scenes with meticulous craftsmanship. It showcased flat but well-organized structures, excellent draftsmanship, and the creation of natural landscapes to enhance beauty. The deliberate use of color spots to accentuate forms was also evident in this style.

- **Bundi Style:** Kota, Bundi, and Malawar served as the main centers of the Bundi style, which emerged as an independent offshoot of the Mewar style in the early 17th century. The Bundi state was founded by Rao Dev in 1341, but the development of paintings started during the reign of Rao Surjan. Rao Ratan Singh created beautiful paintings depicting Deepak and Bhairavi ragas. Shatrushal Singh commissioned the construction of Chhatra Mahal, adorned with exquisite mural paintings in the 18th century.

- **Alwar School of Painting:** The Alwar School of Painting was established in 1775 AD by Raja Pratap Singh of Alwar. The paintings of this style exhibited fine craftsmanship reminiscent of the Mughal period, including details such as smoky shadows on curtains and bold lines that convey strength.

■ **Pahari Paintings Style:**

Pahari painting, influenced by the Rajput style, flourished in various regions situated in the foothills of the Himalayas. However, the impact of Mughal paintings is also evident in this style. The regions along the five rivers - Sutlej, Ravi, Beas, Jhelum, and Chenab - such as Punjab, Jammu-Kangra, and Garhwal, reflect the sentiments, music, and religious traditions of the hill residents in their unique interpretation in this painting style. Pahari style paintings particularly showcase a special depiction of love. Through the portrayal of Krishna and Radha's love, artists sought to intimately and effortlessly depict the love relationship between man and woman.

- **Basohli Style:** This style of paintings emerged from the fusion of Hindu, Mughal, and Pahari styles. The attire is reminiscent of the Mughal style, while the facial features are inspired by local folk art. Hindu religion and traditions greatly influenced this style, with a focus on the depiction of Vishnu and his Dashavatara (Ten Incarnation).

- **Guleri Style:** The Guleri style of paintings predominantly depicts events from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The figures in this style are drawn with great strength and realism, capturing the naturalness of their body parts.

- **Garhwal Style:** This style originated in the Garhwal state during the medieval period. It was pioneered by two painters, Shamnath and Hardas, who served in the court of King Prithpal Shah of Garhwal.

- **Jammu Style:** Influenced by the Mughal style, this painting style developed in the Jammu region. Painters from the Delhi court sought refuge with the hill kings after fleeing from Nadir Shah's terror in Delhi, leading to the creation of a new style of paintings.

- **Kangra Style:** The Kangra style holds a significant place in the history of Indian painting within the Pahari style that developed during the medieval period. It evolved during the reign of King Sansar Chandra of the Katoch dynasty. This

style is characterized by its visual and romantic nature. It primarily features mythological narratives, depictions of heroic figures, and an emphasis on personal portrayals. Women figures are particularly striking in this style, embodying the idealized form according to Indian tradition.

