

1a. Introduction to Indian Paintings

A brief Chronology:

Indian painting has a very long tradition and historic significance in Indian art. The earliest representation of Indian paintings were the rock paintings of pre-historic times, the 'petroglyphs' as found in Bhimbetka, some of them dated back to 5500 BC.

The tradition of painting has been carried-on in the Indian subcontinent since the ancient times. Standing as a witness to this fact are the exquisite murals of Buddhist art such as Ajanta and Bagh, Buddhist and Jain palm leaf manuscripts, Mughal and other provincial Mughal schools of miniature Indian paintings. Many of the traditional Indian paintings, as Ajanta, Bagh and Sittanvasal, portray a love for nature.

India's Buddhist work show ample examples of texts describing palaces of kings and the aristocratic class adorned with paintings, but the Ajanta Cave Paintings are the most significant of the few surviving ones. Smaller scale painting such as in manuscripts was probably also practiced in this period; we find surviving work from the early medieval period (*Khandalavala,1974*).

Mughal paintings represented a fusion of the Persian miniature with older Indian traditions, and from the 17th century its style was spread across the Indian princely courts of all religions, each developing a local/provincial style (*Putney,2003*).

Company paintings were made for British royalty and other noblemen under the British rule. Colonial rule in India saw the introduction of various academic art schools which were inclined towards western style art practices, leading to modernity in Indian painting (*Subramanyan,1978*).

Transformations over centuries:

As all other forms of art all across the globe, Indian paintings have gone through a lot of transformations over centuries. Starting from the early Indus valley Civilizations, then the

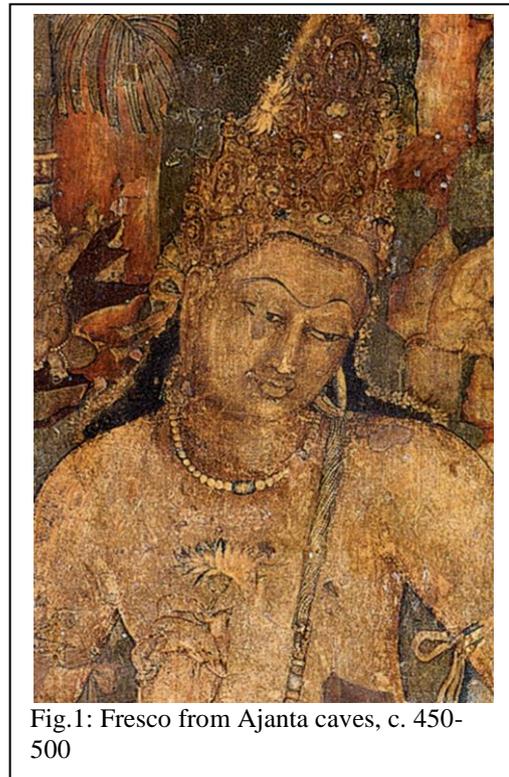


Fig.1: Fresco from Ajanta caves, c. 450-500

Epic period, then to the Buddhist cave paintings and then to the post-Buddhist and early Jain miniature style manuscript illustrations, we can see a lot of gradual and yet striking transformations which changed the focus and direction of art practices in India. What we can generalize through the observation of the art continuum from the earliest days to the end of provincial Mughal School of paintings, is that art practices gradually grew into a more detailed and fine-tuned version. Indian paintings have also witnessed a lot of influences from the various dynasties and change of guards, with each ruler tried to enforce and incorporate his own styles and identity to the Indian paintings.

Moreover, folk and tribal paintings of India are a rich & vivid source of information about the country's rich and diversified heritage. The various Indian states have their own distinct cultural and traditional identities, and are displayed through various forms of art prevalent there, painting being one of the major art forms (*Sivaramamurti, 1970*).

1b. Conceptual framework for study

Throughout ages, paintings served as one of the major forms of manifestation of prevailing modes of lifestyle. Indian paintings provide an aesthetic continuum that extends from the early civilization to the present day. From being essentially religious in purpose in the beginning, Indian painting has evolved over the years to become a fusion of various cultures and traditions.

This study is an attempt to explore the manifestation of the Indian paintings and related art forms present in Indian lifestyle over ages and to reinforce its impact. It is an exploration to gain further insight into the influence and impact of Indian paintings in the Indian lifestyle. It is apparent in every sense that historic art has its impact on today's lifestyle in various forms. But the extent of this impact and influence can be explored to a greater depth.

1c. Objectives of study

The prime objectives of this research:

- To explore the manifestation of Indian paintings in various forms that is related to Indian lifestyle throughout the ages.

The sub-objectives of this research are to study:

- The impact and influence of Indian paintings on Indian society as a whole.
- The relationship and contribution of Indian paintings to practices of religion, rituals, beliefs and customs.
- Paintings as a medium of expression of ideas and mindset.
- Patterns and Motifs derived from ancient Indian paintings which are in common use in post-colonial Indian lifestyles.
- Paintings as a form of expressing emotions.
- To study the scope & future opportunities to explore Indian paintings in various forms related to fashion and lifestyle.

Pre-requisites for fulfilling these objectives are to study:

- The evolutions of Indian Painting & its varied styles.
- The major driving forces that influenced ancient Indian painting scenario.
- The Persian/Mughal influences on Indian Lifestyle and the amalgamation of cultures, practices, customs, decorations, and ornamentations.
- The colonial influences on Indian Lifestyle and the amalgamation of cultures, practices, customs, decorations, and ornamentations.

1d. Methodology of Study

This research is partly exploratory and partly descriptive in nature. Its exploratory nature can be explained as it is an exploration to gain further insight into the influence and impact of ancient Indian paintings in post-colonial Indian fashion & lifestyle. This research is partly descriptive in its nature as it tries to reinforce the presence and existence of ancient Indian paintings in present day lifestyles.

The present study is a review a substantial number of secondary data sources available pertaining to the topic. This led to primary data collection to validate and support and for further exploration.

Several places, architectural monuments, museums of historical significance were visited to find and document the presence of paintings and other related art forms as an integral part of the Indian lifestyle throughout ages.

Research Approach for primary data collection:

This research uses a qualitative approach to validate and support the review of substantial number of relevant literature gone through in detail.

Qualitative methods of data collection included documentary evidences of the decorative panels and murals, decorative ornamentation of objects which are an integral part of the Indian lifestyle. Data collection through these sources were supported and validated through focused interviews with the curators of the museums/galleries or other relevant people of authority in the places visited.

1e. Hypothesis of Research

Throughout ages, paintings served as one of the major forms of manifestation of prevailing modes of lifestyle. It is apparent and evident that paintings have left a huge impact in human minds and it is continuing to instill our lives. The impact can be particularly felt in terms of various elements of paintings. One of the major elements of paintings which have been widely manifested throughout the past few centuries is the 'representations' of the celebrated paintings such as the Buddhist cave paintings of Ajanta, The Jain miniature paintings, The Mughal and Persian miniature paintings and the architectural representations, and last but not the least, the Colonial era paintings. Religious art practices and those related to rituals and customs have always been a glorious tradition of India which is in continuum since the times less known. Decoration and decorative art practices is another major form of expression and an integral part of our day-to-day lives. In fact, many-a-times, decorative practices and religious iconography merges into a single and unified form of expression. We all witness and encounter paintings, in one form or the other, in our own lives and in our surroundings. In a nutshell, the hypothesis states that the manifestations of our traditional aesthetic expressions still are being used in our lifestyle.

1f. Review of relevant literature:

1. Moved by the charm of nature around him, man has expressed his appreciation of it in works of art produced by him. This goes back to a time when he was still a primitive. The earliest paintings of the prehistoric age in the caves all over the world give us magnificent examples of the observant eye and the trained hand even in man's savage state. -- Indian Painting by C.Sivaramamurti
2. The wall of these cave temples were entirely covered with paintings. On the walls of Ajanta, the heroes and heroines of various Jataka (Buddhist) stories appear. They were so skillfully painted that they seem to be living, breathing and acting. These paintings show remarkable breadth of vision. These painters created figures through imagination. Colors were often used to communicate feelings and moods. As the intention was to create "harmony" in the pictures, there is blending of colors, and the painters made the sweeping strokes of rounded forms, rather than sharp lines. Thus the Ajanta paintings have been found to be "Curvaceous", and "rhythmic".

-- Chitralakshana: The story of Indian paintings by Mulk Raj Anand

3. The period ranging from the late 19th Century to the middle of the 20th century (1880-1947) has been termed as a period of 'art-turmoil' in India, which includes both breakdown as well as rediscovery of our rich art tradition at a point when European aesthetic norms were introduced. This conflict between indigenous and western modes leads to further conflict when Indian artists confronted first waves of modern movement of European art. The nomenclature 'Naturalism' is given to the setting up of new art schools with the impact from European style art training which resulted in a new direction to art movement. An intellectual and creative churning took place in the beginning the 20th century when traditional art was rediscovered and reabsorbed in fresh creative ventures which is widely accepted as 'Revivalism'.

-- Historic development of contemporary Indian art, compiled by Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi

1g. Delimitations of the study

Time frame: Pre-historic paintings are not covered in great details and the study is restricted more-or-less within a time frame starting from Buddhist cave paintings to the post-colonial era.

Geographical Locations: Provincial miniature schools of the south and west such as Kangra, Deccan, Gujarat as well as those of the central regions such as Lucknow are not covered in great detail. This study is a focused approach covering the Northern Indian sultanate and Mughal traditions and then moves towards the Bengal-School of paintings during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial India. The reason for selecting Bengal to study the art practices during colonial India is driven by the fact that the undivided Bengal remained as the centre for all sorts of artistic and intellectual developments during that time period. Although the Bombay School of paintings and Gujarat is also covered, but the main focus remains on the developments in and around the vast region of undivided Bengal.