Chapter-II

Art Education in India in the Ancient and Medieval period:
A brief survey
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Ancient Indian discourse on art is revelatory of the Shastric appreciation of art comprising 64 branches. As written in the Kamasutra by Vatsyayana, the well learned city dwellers or ‘Nagarka’ is directed to practice the sixty four arts elaborated in the text in various chapters. Chapter IV of Kamasutra\(^1\), is addressed to the gentleman of taste, his life style and the instructions about the arts to be practiced by him especially the art of painting. Nagarka kept in his house a drawing board, a vessel for holding brushes and other essential material used in painting\(^2\). Vishnudharmottam, the ancient Indian treatise on painting and image making also reveals the information on the nature of art and taste for art of different individuals. Extensive information is available in these texts about the nature of the arts. It is significant to note that according to Indian textual sources no one who was not fully cognizant of the rules and methodology of all the art forms could be considered to be proficient.

\(^1\) “The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana”, Translated from Sanskrit in seven parts by Bhide, Shivaram Parashuram, Burton, Richard Francis, Sir, 1821-1890 and Indrajit, Bhagavanlal, EText-No.27827 Release Date2009-01-18.

in a single one. It was considered very important to have knowledge of arts. According to Vishanudharmotaram, an individual who is unaware of the rules of Citra i.e., painting is not able to discern the characteristics of Pratima Lakshana i.e., image. Without the knowledge of science of dancing, it is difficult to understand the rules of painting. Further, one cannot know the science of dancing without learning music. Lastly without singing, music can't be understood. The study of fine-arts was given a very important place not only in the education of a practitioner of art by profession but also the overall development of aesthetic sense of every individual in general as well. It may also be said that perhaps the ancient Indian aestheticians made some distinction between a “nagarka” i.e., a citizen and a “silpi” i.e., a professional craftsman. It is however interesting to see that the instructions regarding the practices of art remain the same for both. Two types of practitioners of art clearly emerge in the ancient India namely the Nagarka and the Shilpi. The term 'Silpa' is earliest referred to in the samhitas and Brahmanas to define manual arts and crafts and other such artistic work. “Silp and silpi are words of wider connotation and include different types of craftsmen dealing with sculpture or architecture whose education forms the basis of information about the pattern of art instruction that existed in the ancient India” (pl.17-19). Detailed information regarding the

3 Ganguly, Anil Baran, “Fine-arts in ancient India”, New Delhi, 1979, p-16.

techniques of various arts to be followed and the materials to be used is also available in the Vishnudharmottam. Also there are specific instructions regarding the preference of form and subject-matter to be painted in a particular place for example, the paintings depicting love, gaiety and peace for the private residences and supernatural subject-matter was to be painted on the walls of temples and the royal audience halls. The discourse on the art of painting gives an account of instructions to paint the seasons, hours of the day and the connection between mood and time to be painted (pl-20). Further, there are instructions regarding observation of details, sense of movement, light and atmospheric effects and most interestingly the concept of personification that taught versatility in visualizing abstraction to the ancient Indian artist. Further, there is elaboration of the rule of foreshortening referred to in Sanskrit as ‘ksaya’ and ‘Vridhi’ (pl-21). The knowledge of modeling or shading called Varttand was also thoroughly understood by learning Patraja (cross hatching), Airika (stumping), and Vinduja (dots). Chapter 40 of Vishnudharmottara elaborates information on the application of


6 ibid, p 10-11.

7 “The law of ksaya and vridhi was intensely studied by the ancient Indian painter as was perspective by the early Italian masters”

Ibid, p15.
The instructions regarding the art of image making are covered in chapter 44-85. There is a description of more than eighty images of deities on the basis of which canons of proportions of face, body and arms etc. of various images of deities were taught (pl-22). There are certain instructions, which are common to both the art of painting and image making like the teaching of the sense of movement.

Since the schools of silpa evolved in the early centuries of Christian era as indicated by the canons of iconography,

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8 ibid.

9 Kiran Kumar Thaplyal in his book “Jaina Painting”, Wiley Eastern Limited, New Delhi 2001, has given with a very critical and comprehensive study of guilds (srenis) in ancient India. Thaplyal shows that both Merchant Guilds as well the Craft Guilds were very much present and played a vital role in the socio-economic structure of ancient India. His database is literary evidence as found in the scriptures, texts and also archaeological findings. He discusses the institution of the Guilds in four time brackets: (1) The Vedic period, (2) Buddhist/Jain period, (3) Mauryan period and (4) and the Post-Mauryan period. Thaplyal sketches a brief historical review and discusses various aspects of the laws, apprenticeship, structure, offices, accounts and the functions of these guilds. He also shows the relationship of the guild to the state. Reference is made to the cobblers’ guild, the oil millers’ guild, potters guild, weavers’ guild, and hydraulic engineers’ guild. Also many references occur in other texts. The Gautama Dharmasutra (c. 5th century BC) states that “cultivators, traders, herdsmen, moneylenders, and artisans have authority to lay down rules for their respective classes and the king was to consult their representatives while dealing with matters relating to them.” The Jataka tales refer to eighteen guilds, to their heads, to localization of industry and to the hereditary nature of professions. The
it can be surmised through the information that is available to us on the hereditary practice of certain crafts and the relationship between the *Acharya* and his *shishyas*. The actual practice was of the transmission of knowledge from one to the other.\(^\text{10}\) A very specific example of a scene of a Silpasala or 'artisans' workshop', on one of the panels of Laksamanesvara temple complex (900-1050 AD) represents the chief-slipi attentively engraving on a stone slab while smaller figures of apprentices surround and watch him carefully.\(^\text{11}\)

With the strengthening of the social system called Varnasrama, which acted as the backbone of the social and economic structure of India, there emerges a somewhat clearer picture of the pattern of art training in the medieval period. In this system a certain section of people or community practiced art as a profession. And people belonging to that particular community

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\(^\text{58}\) Jataka stories frequently refer to a son following the craft of his father. Often, *kula* and *putta* occur as suffixes to craft-names, the former indicating that the whole family adopted a particular craft and the latter that the son followed the craft of his father. It may, however, be pointed out that adopting a family profession was more common with members of craftsmen's guilds than with members of traders' guilds.


\(^\text{10}\) See Misra, R.N "*Ancient Artist and Art Activity*", Indian Institute of Advanced study, Simla, 1975.

\(^\text{11}\) Ibid, p-76.
cultivated their art in their household and the treasure of secrets of their skill or profession were perhaps passed over to the next generation from teacher to pupil and father to son for example the communities of *patuas* and *chitrakaras* in Orissa\(^\text{12}\). The people of these communities nurtured and transferred the mystics of their art to their future generations under the guidance of the masters (pl-23).

Later, in the Mughal period the picture of the pattern of art instruction emerges more clearly in the form of *karkhana*, the Mughal atelier\(^\text{13}\). Perhaps the concept of karkhana or

\(^{12}\) "In practically every chitrakara house there is a room or hut set apart for work. Such a room is walled in the three sides but open on the fourth, which gives into courtyard. This forms the studio for men and boys. Women generally do not work at the studio...but they prepare the pastes, colours, pigments, material and ingredients for their men...a number of bamboo baskets or boxes are hung from the room in strings in the main studio. These contain hand made brushes of various sizes, shapes and points of a number and variety sufficient to startle even a veteran painter...The master artist begins the day with the lesson and a task to the boys of the family...On the clear and plastered wall of the studio the master draws a few things with red paint. A cow, a horse, a bird or a human figure. This is copied by the boys on the walls or they trace them with their brushes along with the lines drawn by the master to learn the work of the brush and acquire an instinct for their traditional form...The family work as a unit nourishing and guarding their family craft, controlled and directed by the master of the house. Every thing is methodical, clean and impressive".


\(^{13}\) Chandra, Moti "The Technique Of Mughul Painting", Lucknow, pub1949, p74-75.
workshop was the most significant contribution of Akbar to the development of painting in the Mughal period. The main purpose was to produce illuminated manuscripts, which was an elaborate production, requiring the cooperation of calligraphers, painters, preparators for various accessories, such as colour grinders, goldworkers, leatherworkers, bookbinders, and many more. Indeed, the very long books that were thus copied and illustrated could only be produced by the strictest cooperation among all these different craftsmen and artists. In the creation of the Hamzanama, over a hundred artists, excluding calligraphers, burnishers and others who were involved, worked in collaboration in the imperial atelier while 1400 passages of the epic were illustrated (pl-24). Evidently such results could be achieved only by absolute and firm control over both men and materials and the karkhana was the only means. It used to function like a well set up establishment. The work done in the Karkhana was referred to as 'Ghan ki tasveer'. The process was helpful in making a series of paintings for book illustration (pl-25). In the first stage the composition (tarah) was drawn by the master artist which was then handed over to the pupils under him in order to fill the colours. Infact different artists were specialists in different skills like, certain artists were specialists in outlines, others in drawing figures and still others in colouring, therefore, often a picture was the composite work of several artists. Artists such as Bishndas or Govardhan, excelled in portraiture; while Mansur was a master in his

\[14\] Ibid.
ability to recreate nature. It took several years of relentless training to get such accomplishment (plates 26-29). It is well-established fact that under Akbar and Jahangir the Mughal artists copied European prints and engravings. It has been suggested that artist named Kesu was better than others in copying European works. Several albums and books were illustrated in the Mughal period under Akbar, Jehangir and some during the reign of Shah Jahan in the same manner.\(^1\)

This act of producing miniature paintings for the purpose of illustrating ancient religious and other popular texts was continued in the Rajaput and Pahari school of painting. Thus, more or less the same pattern of accomplishing the work and the instruction was continued in the Rajasthani and the Pahari painting.\(^2\) The prominent court painters handed over the secrets of their skill to their heirs or their sons.

Even though the influence of European art on the Indian artist can be observed in the Moghul period itself at the time of Moghul Emperor Akbar.\(^3\) The illustrated and illuminated

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\(^{2}\) ibid.

\(^{3}\) Akbar first came into direct contact with the Europeans in 1575 A.D as a result he developed interest in Europe, Christianity and Christian art. His painters are known to have been encouraged by him to study European paintings and to imbibe the elements of European art. His painters thus started adopting the European principals in their compositions. A significant example is that of Kesav Das who presented Akbar an album of copies made from religious art of Europe.
European manuscripts were presented to Akbar. One such painting was the copy of Byzantine Virgin\(^{18}\) (pl-30). In fact he was so impressed by the stylistic differences that he extorted the artists to copy some of these works. In comparison with the early Akbari books, in certain paintings particularly in those produced towards the end of his reign certain changes can be sensed. Compositions


\(^{18}\) "In the second half of the sixteenth century there was increasing evidence of social exchange. This exchange was evident in the impact of European illustrations and paintings on the Mughal art. Emperor Akbar invited Jesuit missionaries to his court and was presented with a polyglot Bible illustrated by Italian and Flemish artists. The missionaries also presented Akbar with several paintings. The best known of these was a copy of the Byzantine virgin now in the Borghese chapel of the Basilica of the Santa Maria Maggiore at Rome. This painting was hung in the Jesuit Chapel at Fatehpur Sikri. By 1580 Mughal artists were copying European paintings. There were adaptations as well. Paintings with European themes were drawn with Indian costumes or European figures were drawn on an Asian background."


\(^{19}\) Minissale, Gregory, The Synthesis of European and Mughal Art in the Emperor Akbar’s Khamsa of Nizami.

http://www.asianart.com/articles/minissale/
became more complex and varied; perspective was better understood and the space within the picture was better organized; there was more artful rendering of the landscapes (plates 31-32). Figures were better modeled. Also the brush strokes were more subtle and more accomplished; and there was more sophistication observed in tonality. More importantly, now there was stronger emphasis placed on individual characterizations, which were stressed in portraits and became even more intent and notable in Jahangiri pictures. Many of these achievements were due not to internal developments but to the artists' familiarity with external sources: European prints, engravings and pictures. The process of European influence on Indian artist's style of work accelerated during the time of Jahangir. "Dara shikoh's portrait, which was sketched in ovoid frames, is totally based upon European technique. This style was subsequently adopted by artists like Bal chand, Mohammad Hashim and Chittaraman who were also in his court (pl-33). Later these artists had to look towards patrons in the provincial courts instead of Delhi as Aurangzeb did not encourage artistic activities.

During the late 1700s, with the expansion of East India Company's purview in India, it became common among the elite Europeans to travel to India as they were attracted to its exotic people and places which they eagerly got recorded in the form of paintings so they hired artists for this purpose. Among the famous

20 Marika Sardar, "Company Painting In Nineteenth Century India", Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, Heilbrunn Timeline of art.
Indian artists of this genre, named Company School of painting were painters from Patna kalam namely Sewak Ram, Hulas Lall, Shiv Lal, Shiva Dayal, Mahadeo Lal and Ishwari Prasad Verma, Ghulam Ali Khan and members of his family of Delhi and Shaikh Muhammad Amir of Calcutta. Their main subjects were bazaar scenes, local rulers, local festivals and ceremonies (plates 34-37). Thus, the influence of western artist’s work that was patronized by Indian kings and nobles had a great impact on Indian artist’s style of work. The British brought with them all new concepts and philosophy of art, artist and art education, which set in motion processes that ultimately led to the transformation of traditional Indian system of art education. With the British patronage of traditional Indian artists particularly after the decline of the Mughal court on one hand and the appreciation of European artists’ work by the Indian patrons of art on the other, resulted in a new style of painting called Company painting in which the western artistic ideals of chiaroscuro, anatomical rectitude, scientific perspective jostled with traditional miniaturists’ sense of space, flat colours and a conceptual rendering of figures. A formal induction in an artistic technology that included the use of oil


colours and the treatment of space, figures and composition more in consonance with the western aesthetics was made possible only after a new policy of general education came into being. Macaulay’s famous Minute of 1835 clearly defined the aims of the new education.

“It is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.”

The objectives of the new system of education introduced by the rulers are also clearly laid down in the comment of Charles Trevelyan who discussed the question of education from all standpoints and concluded that a million sterling annually expended on the education of the Indians would “render them at once to our rule and worthy of our alliance.”

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education in India inevitably furthered the process of westernization of art education too, in India. The archival material reveals certain interesting features of the impact of the British system of education on both the Indian artists and the indigenous art training system.

This work is only an initial attempt to briefly document the stages and manner in which the new training methodology was introduced in the Punjab and its subsequent impact on the Punjabi artist as extensive material still lies unexplored.