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Cell : 9595 359 435, Ph No: 02172372010 Email: ayisrj@yahoo.in Website: www.ror.isrj.org



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ADVENT OF MINIATURE PAINTING IN INDIA



Rimpy Agarwal

Assistant Professor, Apeejay College Of Fine Arts, Jawahar Nagar,
Mahavir Marg, Jalandhar, Punjab.

ABSTRACT

It has been found that the art had emerged right at the birth of man. Therefore art and man have been on integral part of each other's life. Till 8th century, a lot of work was done in the cave temples, sculptures, stupas and relief sculptures. After this gigantic work drastic changes occurred in the world of art due to many reasons. The followers of Buddhism made strenuous and fresh efforts to spread their religion across the boundaries of India to foreign lands. Solid and huge work was replaced by petite, delicate art work and this was miniature painting. Thus came the emergence of the manuscript paintings. This art was mainly an instrument of religion. Miniature means very tiny. The main examples of this art have been found in Pala Buddhist manuscripts from Bihar, Bengal and western India. Some early examples of these paintings have been found in Kashmir. Although miniature painting was the latest one but if we take a look at the seals made in the era of Indus Valley Civilization, they were also executed on a surface area of 2"x 3". It is probable that these seals later on became the inspiration for miniature paintings. In Pala paintings the presence of the early tradition of mural work has been clearly felt. The technique applied in these murals has been executed in a diminutive manner in miniature paintings. Although this form was executed with devotion and faith but the monks painters who painted these palm leaves manuscripts were dexterous painters. These manuscript paintings could propagate religion in far away countries for being handy. Along with it the specimen of this Indian art form which was beyond comparison reached in different parts of world. This form of art acquainted the people with rich Indian heritage and traditions.

KEYWORDS: Miniature Painting, Indian Art, Religious Art, Handy Art, Buddhism.

INTRODUCTION

Art and society have always been in sync fight from the time of early man. It has been found that the art had emerged right at the birth of man. Therefore art and man have been on integral part of each other's life. With the advancement of civilization, art also got appropriate means for development. When man lived in caves, then those caves became the base for his art. Wall paintings were a beautiful landmark in the world of art. No doubt the era of wall paintings lasted till 12th C.A.D. but it saw its decline in 9th-10th C.A.D. A new art form was to come in existence. The followers of Buddhism made strenuous and fresh efforts to spread their religion across the boundaries of India to foreign lands. Thus came the emergence of the manuscript paintings. Although this art form was new, yet Ajanta was the inspiration behind it. But these artists of manuscript paintings could not execute these manuscript paintings like the supremacy of wall paintings. Till 8th century, a lot of work was done in the cave temples, sculptures, stupas and relief sculptures. This art was mainly an instrument of religion. After this gigantic work drastic changes occurred in the world of art due to many reasons. One main reason was the Muslim invaders who were spoiling the rich heritage of India like temples, monuments, palaces. Another reason was that the Buddhist monks wanted to spread Buddhism to other countries. So solid and huge work was replaced by petite, delicate art work and this was miniature painting. Miniature means very tiny. Having originated in 7th century this form of art initially flourished in Bihar and Bengal. At the outset these paintings were made on palm leaves.

These paintings were executed on cloth, palm leaf and wooden panels for social and religious purposes. It had become increasingly difficult to save the paintings from vandalism due to unreliability of foreign invaders. Consequently no traces of initial paintings executed on palm leaves and wooden panels can be found. Some examples of these paintings have been found in Kashmir. But this form of art executed on cloth in initial years is hardly available.¹ It is said Buddhism was introduced in Ladakh by a missionary Madhyantika sent by Ashoka. Kashmir was under the rule of Ashoka, Kanishka and Mihiragula. During the reign of Karkota dynasty it was ruled by Lalitadiya (725-726 A.D.). It emerged as a manor power. During this time a big revival took place in the world of art in Kashmir. It appears when Lalitaditya conquered Guptas (Bihar and Bengal), then Buddhist paintings, sculpture, art and artists also entered Magadha. The artwork of these artists can not be termed as Pala style but the particular Pala tradition which started developing in the century had started establishing itself in Kashmir. This form of art earned a lot of reverence in Ladakh. So the signs of initial manuscript paintings are also found in Ladakh because at this time Ladakh was very much in touch with eastern India.²

Before 1st C.A.D paintings in India were executed for illustration of volume of sacred scriptures. Initially these books were accomplished in slim, delicate palm leaves in height of 2". They were tied with threads inside flat wooden covers. The main examples of this type have been found in Pala Buddhist manuscripts from Bihar, Bengal and western India. The calligrapher who worked for these sacred texts guided the painters about area and subject matter of painting. After the text was written on a palm leaf it was handed over to the painters for painting. The figures painted in palm leaf illustrations show glimpses of Pala sculpture of late medieval period.³

Although miniature painting was the latest one but if we take a look at the seals made in the era of Indus Valley Civilization, they were also executed on a surface area of 2"x 3". The relief carving done on these seals exhibits the deftness of artists. They carved different types of detailed figures on such small surfaces. It is probable that these seals later on became the inspiration for miniature paintings. It

was more difficult to paint than to carve on such a narrow area, even then the Indus Valley can be considered foundation for miniature painting. A glimpse of Ajanta murals can also be seen in miniature painting.

The Pala rulers became the main patrons of this art form. This art form continued from 7th C.A.D to the middle of the 12th C.A.D. The main subject matter of this new art form was Buddha. This art form was prevalent mainly in Bihar and Bengal which were under the Pala kings. Later on, Nepal too contributed a lot to this art style. The manuscript paintings were made on the Palmyra or palm leaf and were very small in size. These leaves were set in a format of 22" x 2 ½" but a space of only 2 ½" x 3" was left for paintings and rest of the space was meant for writing some text which was out of context with the paintings. The language scripted was Devnagri.⁴ In Pala paintings the presence of the early tradition of mural work has been clearly felt. The technique applied in these murals has been executed in a diminutive manner in miniature paintings. Ajanta paintings can also be glanced in architectural background, personal ornaments and decorative motifs in these miniature paintings. While abridging the mural art a number of deficiencies appeared in these paintings but even then the plastic sense of Ajanta painting tradition can be felt to a large extent. These paintings have a lax grip on Ajanta characteristics of intense nobility and tragic power but these images have a good effect of softness and delicacy.⁵

The main aim of palm leaf art of Pala and Nepal was iconographic and predominantly the foremost characteristic of these Nepalese and Bengali paintings that these paintings on be executed in fresco size without any change. Moreover these paintings also divulge that these miniature painters were well acquainted with the wall painting technique. When the demand for miniature paintings increased then these dexterous painters executed fresco technique at such a small scale (2"x 3").⁶ But no change occurred in arrangement and iconography of the figures, rather these scenes became more crowded and colours became stronger and formal. Art developed into more decorative manner but it also became sectarian and less emotional. But glowing colours and excellent drawing have made these manuscript illustrations very aesthetic and added to their historical importance. Western Indian miniature also clarifies that the style and composition of painting is related the ancient reliable tradition.⁷

The two schools of Indian miniature paintings, i.e., the Pala and the Jain school were active in the same time frame. However, the two can be distinguished on the basis of painting technique, style and design. The two schools, however, share a common feature, viz., the main aim of the paintings was the decoration of manuscripts.⁸

At the beginning of the Christian era the tradition of Indian religious art reached Turkestan and China through Indian Buddhist missionaries and craftsmen. Before entering India, the paintings that revived in Persia under Mughal rule were especially nurtured in Chinese school which was itself inspired by the great school of India. Chinese students who came to India for higher studies used to take exemplification of Indian heritage along with them. In this way the combination of Indian idealism and naturalism led to the emergence of modern school of China and Japan which was closer to European artists and critics than to Indian art from whom they had learnt so many things about art. Under this sort of inspiration Chinese painting reached its zenith in the 7th century. This period is also considered the highest peak of art for Indian pictorial art. This very Chinese art exceeded the contemporary European art. In 1279 A.D. when southern empire was at its brink, the Chinese had excelled in all the different painting techniques of world and there was no one to beat them in painting except their own pupils.⁹ Though this art did not flourish in Persia, one thing that becomes clear is that miniature

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painting was being pursued in India's neighboring countries as well. One reason for this could be the impact of manuscripts that were sent to neighboring states in 8-9th C.A.D. to spread Buddhism.

It is worth mentioning that the Chinese art which became the head of world's art in 1279 A.D and had flourished and touched the pinnacle of art by taking inspiration from India. Many countries had learnt the basis of painting from India. Similarly the Mughal art which became the supreme art of India had basically come from Iran and Iraq but certain harshness was found in their art form. Western India predominantly taught a number of fine nuances to Mughal art. Later on Mughal art became an art form par excellence due to amalgamation of Western Indian miniature art form and Rajput art.

In this way the artists of new Iranian School emerged out of a synthesis of Indian art tradition and Chinese naturalism. Later on these artists became the court painters of Babur. Through these artists of Indian art was routed back to India.¹⁰ Pala painting was the final development of ancient Eastern School and Jain painting of Gujarat was Final evolution of Western School.¹¹ A lot of work of Eastern Indian painting was executed in Gujarat Buddhist universities like Nalanda and Vikramasila by Buddhist monks who were not guild craftsmen. Although this form was executed with devotion and faith but the monks painters who painted these palm leaves manuscripts were dexterous painters. But the painters who executed Jain manuscripts were predominantly guild craftsmen.¹²

There must have been innumerable reasons for the introduction of miniature painting but this revolution in art bestowed upon India an excellent form of art. Manuscript painting could propagate religion in far away countries for being handy. Along with it the specimen of this Indian art form which was beyond comparison reached in different parts of world. This form of art acquainted the people with rich Indian heritage and traditions. Manuscript painting came into being, due to eastern and western influence and on its basis beautiful art forms like Mughals, Rajsthan and Pahari came into existence. Although these forms of art are not so active at present but even today the trend of manuscript painting is still going on strong.

CONCLUSION:

There must have been innumerable reasons for the introduction of miniature painting but this revolution in art bestowed upon India an excellent form of art. Miniature paintings initially found in Pala Buddhist manuscripts from Bihar, Bengal and western India. It had become increasingly difficult to save the paintings from vandalism due to unreliability of foreign invaders. Consequently no traces of initial paintings executed on palm leaves and wooden panels can be found. These paintings were executed on cloth, palm leaf and wooden panels for social and religious purposes. In Pala paintings the presence of the early tradition of mural work has been clearly felt. The technique applied in these murals has been executed in a diminutive manner in miniature paintings. Ajanta paintings can also be glanced in architectural background, personal ornaments and decorative motifs in these miniature paintings. While abridging the mural art a number of deficiencies appeared in these paintings but even then the plastic sense of Ajanta painting tradition can be felt to a large extent. The main aim of palm leaf art of Pala and Nepal was iconographic and predominantly the foremost characteristic of these Nepalese and Bengali paintings that these paintings can be executed in fresco size without any change. Moreover these paintings also divulge that these miniature painters were well acquainted with the wall painting technique. When the demand for miniature paintings increased then these dexterous painters executed fresco technique at such a small scale (2"x 3"). But no change occurred in arrangement and iconography of the figures, It is worth mentioning that the Chinese art who became the head of world's art in 1279 A.D and had flourished and touched the pinnacle of art by taking inspiration from India.

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Later on Mughal art also became an art form par excellence due to amalgamation of Western Indian Miniature art form and Rajput art. Manuscript painting came into being, due to eastern and western influence and on its basis beautiful art forms like Mughals, Rajsthan and Pahari came into existence. Although these forms of art are not so active at present but even today the trend of manuscript painting is still going on strong.

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