

Module 5 Ancient fine arts of India are Painting, handicrafts, Indian classic music, Dance and Drama

Hello Learners,

Today we are going to learn about Ancient Fine arts of India

First let us see on Indian Paintings

- Of various art forms, painting has always been a very powerful medium of cultural tradition and expression. It is associated with values, beliefs, behaviour of mankind and provides material objects to understand people's way of life, their thought process and creativity.
- In simple words, painting has become a bridge to our past, reflecting what people think and want to depict. Painting is also a part of tangible material culture, where human creations are termed as artifacts and helps in understanding the cultural values. It is a human way of transforming elements of world into symbol, where each of it has a distinct meaning and can also be manipulated.
- Compared to sculpture, painting is easier to execute and that is why Stone Age people chose it as an expression of their beliefs and imaginations. In fact, painting marks an entirely new phase in the human history and is regarded as a giant cultural leap.

Ancient Indian Painting Tradition

- Painting as an art form has flourished in India from very early times as is evident from the remains that have been discovered in the caves, and the literary sources.
- The history of art and painting in India begins with the pre-historic rock painting at caves near (M.P.) where we have drawings and paintings of animals.
- The cave paintings of (Maharashtra) show skins of spotted deer left drying. Thousands of years ago, paintings and drawings had already appeared on the seals of Harappan civilization.
- The Buddhist text Vinayapitaka (4th–3rd century) describes the existence of painted figures in many royal buildings. The play Mudrarakshasa (5th Century A.D.) mentions numerous paintings or Patas. The 6th Century AD text on aesthetics-Kamasutra by Vatsyayana has mentioned painting amongst 64 kinds of arts and says that it was based on scientific principles.
- The best specimens of Gupta paintings are the ones at Ajanta. Their subject was animals and birds, trees, flowers, human figures and stories from the Jataka.
- Mural paintings are done on walls and rock surfaces like roofs and sides. Cave no. 9 depicts the Buddhist monks going towards a stupa. In cave no. 10 Jataka stories are depicted. But the best paintings were done in the 5th – 6th centuries AD during the Gupta age.

- The murals chiefly depict religious scenes from the life of the Buddha and the Buddhist Jataka stories but we also have secular scene. Here we see the depiction of all aspects of Indian life.
- We see princes in their palaces, ladies in their chambers, coolies with loads over their shoulders, beggars, peasants and ascetics, together with all the many beasts, birds and flowers of India.
- In India both murals are painted on thin coat of limestone mixture dried with glue, and frescoes are painted on wet lime plaster are found. It is also noticed that in ancient times the colours used in these paintings are derived from natural organic pigments.

Classical paintings

- One of the best examples of the Classical paintings is from the Ajanta Caves, painted between circa 200 B.C. and A.D. 600 Ajanta has thirty-one Caves, built in two phases – first one was around 2nd century B.C. and second was between 4th and 6th centuries A.D. In both phases, the art was patronized by the Hindu rulers – the Satvahanas (in the early period) and the Vakatakas (in the later period). The famous Ajanta caves can be considered as ancient art galleries.
- The Indian art has been inspired by spiritualism and mystical relationship between the God and man. The earliest recorded art was inspired by religious Hindu background and it was later replaced by the popular Buddhist art. The philosophy of aesthetics was closely related to thoughts in the Upanishads and thus art played a very important role in the Indian religious life. Inward vision, sense of great peace and tranquility – are the hall marks of Indian art. The early caves of Ajanta are of the Hinayana order, where the monks worshipped symbols such as stupa, wheel etc.

Painting in the post – classical period

- While studying painting tradition of India, the contribution made by the south Indian kingdoms of the Cholas, Vijaynagara and Nayakas cannot be ignored. In the Chola temples there are many fresco paintings seen at Vijayala Colesvara temple at Narttamalai (A.D. 1100), Brihadesvara temple at Tanjavur (A.D. 1100), Sangita – Mandapa at Tiruparuttikunram in Kanchipuram (A.D. 1387-88) and Vcayapa Matha at Angundi (about the same date). The Chola frescoes were first discovered in A.D. 1931 within the circumambulatory passage of Brihadeshvara temple
- The Chola frescoes have ardent spirit of Saivism expressed in them. In all paintings, Chola physiognomical and stylistic forms are apparent. The Classical values of full roundedness of volume, subtle plasticity are also retained. But at the same time, there is also strongly perceptible lessening of the consistency of colour modelling and hence a flattening of surface is there, despite ample curves and colour.
- During the Nayaka period, the Chola paintings were painted over. The latter paintings belonging to the Vijaynagara period (the Lepakshi wall painting), show general decline in the art style. Outline became sharper and dedicate modelling of earlier period is absent.

Medieval Indian Painting

- The advent of Islam and the spread of Islamic influence, initiated a new period in Indian history ---the medieval period. It also had a direct impact on the realm of painting.
- The pattern of large-scale paintings, which had dominated the scene, were replaced by the miniature painting during the 11th and 12th centuries A.D.
- The miniature paintings are small paintings. They were often part of manuscripts written at the time and illustrated the subjects of the manuscript. Thus, a new kind of illustration was set during the period under review.

Mughal painting

- Medieval painting is, largely represented by the Mughal School, which developed during the period of the Mughal empire (16th -19th centuries A.D.). Renowned for their brilliant colours, accuracy in line drawing, detailed realism, intricacy and variety of themes – the Mughal paintings were a class by themselves.
- It was distinct from all other styles and techniques of Pre- Mughal and Contemporary art. Contrary to Delhi sultanate, the Mughal paintings were more popular and widespread.
- There were several factors responsible for it – urbanization, better administrative system, exclusive patronage by the rulers and nobility, synthesis of cultural values and tradition of Central Asia, integration of Mughal economy with world economy, etc. In fact, painting became a widespread source of livelihood during the rule of Mughals.
- The Mughal painting did not develop in vacuum. It had clear influence of different tradition of contemporary world, namely, Persian, Timurid, Mongolid, Chinese and European.
- The diffusion of these styles with the indigenous style created a new living tradition of painting, popularly known as Indo-Sino-Persian art. Initially, the Mughal style of painting had dominant Mongolid characteristics but gradually the Mongolid elements diminished and the Indian characteristics came to the forefront. Thus diffusion of various styles led to creation of a new cultural element.
- The Mughals used paintings as a tool of display of political power, imperial ideology, authority, status and economic prosperity. The Mughal paintings were very rich in variety- in terms of themes and colours. Some of the themes were- illustration of battles, scenes from court life, wild life, hunting, portraits, etc. Rich use of colours obtained from precious stones, metals like gold and silver-were also hallmark of the Mughal paintings.

Modern Indian Painting

- The decline of the Mughal Empire was accompanied by the control of English East India Company in A.D. 1757 over north-eastern region, thus laying the foundation of British Raj.
- In the realm of art, Indian art gave into new fashion brought by the English. The art was no longer confined to court but began to be taught and patronized by art schools, art societies, etc.
- The new landscape, unusual flora and fauna, stunning monuments, exotic new people caught the attention of English travelers, Company Sahibs and Mem Sahibs. They began to hire Indian painters in 18th and 19th centuries A.D. to capture the quaint oriental images. Thus in the cities ruled by the English East India company, the Company School of painting emerged under western influence.
- The hub of Company paintings were centers like Calcutta, Delhi, Madras, Varanasi and Patna, where either the English had a factory or commercial interest. Calcutta was among the early major center of Company paintings.
- The reaction to the Company School in the mid-19th century was two-fold. On one hand Raja Ravi Varma adapted a distinct method to evolve a new style of painting of Indian subjects whereas on the other hand the 'Nationalist school' represented by the nationalist painter preferred to look at Indian themes and manifested it in the works of the famous 'Bengal School'.

Raja Ravi Varma (A.D. 1848-1906)

- Raja Ravi Varma of royal family of Travancore received formal training in painting, before entering the 'low' profession of paintings against his family's objections. His paintings were inspired by the Victorian art but were more akin to art form of the royal court. Raja Ravi Varma achieved recognition for his depiction of the scenes from the epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana and thus rose to be a remarkable portrait painter, prized by both, the Raj and the Indian elite.
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- Bengal School reflected nationalist fervours in the paintings and resistance to British rule in their own way.
- Various folk-art forms like Mithila paintings (Madhubani), Kalamkari painting, Warli painting and Kalighat painting took Indian painting to new heights by adding new dimensions to it.

