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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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FOUNDATIONS OF RAJASTHAN'S CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC TRADITION: FOLK ART FORMS AND MINIATURE PAINTING TRADITIONS (PHAD, KAVAD)

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ABSTRACT

The folk art of Rajasthan has always captivated with its unique form, and the themes of folk art are as deep as the colors are playful. In this consumer-driven culture, art is a medium that bridges the gap between humanity and nature. In the complexity of life, an artist works across various mediums, channeling the emotions that arise in their inner being. From stone to newspaper clippings, they have made various materials their medium. The powerful and subtle observations connected to the delicate realities of life, the ordinary perspectives, and imaginative art cannot disregard the fundamental creative power in it.

INTRODUCTION

“साहित्यसंगीतकलाविहीनः साक्षात्पशुः पुच्छ विषाण्हीनः”

This means that a person without literature, music, and art is akin to an animal without a tail and horns. We are well aware that art emerged with the birth of humanity, upon coming in contact with nature's beauty, humans began creating paintings inspired by the interaction between them and animals. As human development progressed, the realm of art expanded, and its extended form can be seen in the arts today. The relationship between humans and art has existed since ancient times. Humans created art using whatever medium they had, whether poetry, music, painting, or sculpture, capturing the emotions present within through various elements. Rajasthan, a vast region in the northwest of India, is famous for its folk culture and rich traditions. This land is like an endless stream of nectar, refreshing and uplifting anyone who encounters it. Rajasthan is renowned for its seven-colored artistic culture, vibrant landscapes, colorful costumes, and its rich festivals. The unique beauty of this sacred land has always evoked deep emotions in those who appreciate its charm.

Naturally, Rajasthan's beauty has served as a medium for artists, inspiring them to begin their creative work. The traditional folk arts of Rajasthan have beautifully expressed mythological stories, historical events, heroes, and love tales, bringing to life every figure and event depicted. The folk art traditions of Rajasthan, connected to religious sentiments, folk beliefs, and ornate, simple forms such as miniature painting, Phad painting, Pichwai, Kawad, Thewa, and Usta art, are still prevalent. Due to changing lifestyle, many of these traditional arts are fading away. If they are not given recognition and protection, a time may come when future generations will only be able to learn about our culture and civilization from museums and libraries. It is necessary that everyone make efforts according to their ability to preserve these arts. This article will provide a brief overview of Rajasthan's miniature painting including Pichwai, Phad painting, Kawad painting, and more.

Miniature Painting: The miniature painting style of Rajasthan holds a significant place in the realm of Indian art. Rajasthani miniature painting refers to a style in which the tradition of painting, intertwined with spirituality, creates a supernatural world by depicting human emotion of human nature. These paintings showcase a tradition where reality and imagination are often interlinked. Globally, no other art form can match Rajasthani miniature painting, which, with its intricate details, conveys subtlety, tenderness, and

simplicity on a small surface. The images in these miniatures are created through innumerable fine lines, forming extremely delicate shapes that are intrinsically complete. Rajasthani miniature art reflects a long, detailed history, culture, tradition, and natural beauty across centuries.



Determining when, where, and how Rajasthani style originated is difficult, as historians have long held differing opinions. In the early stages, Gujarati and Jain styles influenced the miniature art, and later, when Mughal rule was established, features of Mughal art were gradually integrated into local art. However, a time came when the Rajasthani style began to emerge in its pure form. The miniature paintings we see today were not created at one particular time or place but were created in various locations and time periods. Due to its proximity to Gujarat, the influence of the Gujarati style was first seen in the Mewar style, which was the earlier to develop. Gradually, other styles were also influenced, leading to the development of substyles. Sometimes, these styles show glimpses of Rajasthan's natural beauty and the influence of other styles from the country.

These expressive styles depict various scenes from the life of Krishna, Ram, Hanuman, Shiva-Parvati, Vishnu, Lakshmi, and other deities, saints, kings, queens, and especially women performing various activities on the same canvas. Rajasthani painters sought to depict various aspects of life. The lyrical essence of poetry is depicted through painting, and nature is not portrayed as inert but rather humanized and deeply integrated into the artwork. These artworks present nature's beauty in especially captivating scenes. These miniatures reflect the creator's affection for nature, with each depiction of natural beauty aligned with the theme. In these miniatures, the artists have created works that encompass all the emotions through depictions of nature, religious beliefs, heroes and heroines, and historical events. The first scientific classification of Rajasthani miniature painting was done by Ananda Kumar Swami in 1916 in his book **Rajput Painting**. He divided Rajput art into two categories: Rajasthani and Pahari (hill) painting. The Rajasthani painting style is further divided into four regions:

- Mewar – Chavand, Udaipur, Nathdwara, Devgarh, etc.
- Marwar – Jodhpur, Bikaner, Kishangarh, etc.
- Hadoti – Bundi, Kota, etc.
- Dhundhad – Amer, Jaipur, Alwar, Uniara, Shekhawati, etc.

When viewing the paintings of these regions, they may seem similar, but they can be distinguished by specific characteristics such as vibrant colors, thematic diversity, depictions of trees in landscapes, and distinctive eye shapes.



For example, the Kishangarh, Jodhpur, and Bikaner styles have "khajan" (circular) eyes; the Jaipur style has "meen" (fish-shaped) eyes; and the Udaipur and Nathdwara styles feature "mriga" (deer-shaped) eyes. These styles also vary in the depiction of clouds. In Bikaner, clouds are depicted with rings; in Nathdwara, clouds are painted black; in Udaipur, dense blue clouds are seen; in Jaipur, the clouds are blue; and in Kota, the clouds are depicted as rolling and swirling. These and other examples allow one to distinguish between these styles. Thus, the beauty of these miniatures cannot be defined with just a few words or definitions. What is needed today is the encouragement and recognition of the artists working in these styles to ensure the preservation of these miniature paintings.

Pichwai: Pichwai is an exceptional form of art from Nathdwara, Rajasthan, which reflects the religious values of the region. The word "Pichwai" means a curtain that is hung behind, depicting events related to Lord Srinathji and the surrounding environment, presented with beauty and artistic grace. Steeped in devotion and artistic expression, pichwai paintings hold deep significance for devotees, with their figures imbued with spiritual meaning. The history of Pichwai art are believed to trace back to the reign of Aurangzeb, who, due to his strict religious policies, started demolition of temples and idols. During this time, some priests, along with their deities, sought refuge in safer places. It is said that Damodarji and his uncle Govindji set out with the idol of Lord Srinathji from the Govardhan Hill in Braj. Under the patronage of Maharaja Raj Singh of Mewar, the idol of Srinathji was enshrined in the village of Sehad with proper rituals.

It is after the installation of Lord Srinathji, the deity of the Vaishnav sect, in Nathdwara that the art of Pichwai painting began. The fabric used for creating Pichwai paintings comes in various sizes, such as two feet, three feet, five feet, and even up to ten feet. The natural colors in these paintings are derived from minerals and plant extracts. Pichwai not only displays the grandeur of the temple but also narrates events from the life of Lord Srinathji. Pichwai paintings are changed according to the significance of each season. For example, in winter, the background is painted with deep colors and adorned with heavy embroidery and ornaments. In summer, the paintings are designed to evoke a cooler atmosphere. Each Pichwai is crafted to complement the ornaments adorned by Lord Srinathji. During the monsoon season, the paintings commonly feature peacocks, cuckoos, Radha-Krishna, Gopis, and ponds.



Phad painting: Rajasthan's folk art is a part of its cultural heritage. The sacred land of Rajasthan nourishes this art in all its forms - painting, dance, or crafts – each infused with life's essence. One of the forms of Rajasthan's folk art is Phad painting or Pat painting. The word "Pat" refers to cloth, meaning paintings on cloth depicting various forms of folk deities and their heroic tales. Since the entire story and its characters are painted on the cloth in a specific sequence, comprehending it at first glance can be challenging. It is believed that the tradition of Phad painting is 700 years old. This form of painting showcases folk culture, and traditional painters known as Chitras and Bhopas (storytellers and singers) make these paintings. As a result, Phad paintings exhibit a uniquely blend visual art, folk literature, theater, music, and instruments, creating the effect of an entire theatrical performance within the artwork. Because Phad paintings depict the images of folk deities, they are considered sacred. Once opened, the Phad must be read completely before it is folded again. In case the Phad gets torn or damaged, it is not discarded but instead immersed in the sacred Pushkar Lake (in Ajmer).

Phad painting from the Shahpura town in Bhilwara district of Rajasthan is world-renowned. The Joshi family, in particular, is famous for their Phad paintings. Shri Lal Joshi, a renowned Phad artist from this family, was honored with the Padma Shri award in 2006 and brought worldwide recognition to this art form. The paintings on small and large Phads are sung by the Bhopas while playing musical instruments. These paintings depict events from the lives of Rajasthan's folk deities such as Pabuji, Devnarayanji, and others. Notable Phads include those depicting the life of Pabuji, Devnarayanji, Ramdevji, and Bhainsasur. While the painters are responsible for creating the Phads, it is the Bhopas of the Charan caste who make these paintings popular. After the Phad is painted by the artist, professional Bhopas and Charans take them from village to village, singing and explaining the meaning of the images while playing their instruments. The most popular Phad is the one depicting Pabuji, the protector against plagues, sung by Bhopas of the Nayak caste. While singing this Phad, the Bhopas use a musical instrument called Ravanhatha, and Pabuji is often depicted holding a spear and riding a yellow horse or shown around it. The Phad of Devnarayanji is considered the longest, most illustrated, and oldest of all. It is sung by people from the Gurjar, Jat, and Kumhar castes, with the Gurjar caste being the primary group. They use a musical instrument called Jantar. In this Phad, Devnarayanji is shown holding a serpent and riding his horse, Lilaghar. In Phad paintings, the main figure is usually larger than the other figures, and the colors used to fill the shapes are generally flat and limited to a few hues. Faces are depicted with large eyes and heavy features. The Phad depicting Bhainsasur is unique in that it is not sung. It is believed that during the monsoon season, all the gods sleep, so both the creation and recitation of Phads

stop during this period. When a specific vow or prayer is fulfilled, people have **Phads** sung in gratitude. Sometimes, entire villages come together to have a **Phad** sung when a vow is completed. Before the **Phad** is sung, the **Bhopas** are invited, along with family and relatives.



Traditional Method: For Phad painting, hand-woven cloth, known as Reza or Reji, is used. The length of this cloth typically ranges from five to eighteen hands. To prepare this thick cloth as a surface for painting, first, wheat paste is applied to the cloth, and it is left to dry. After the paste dries, it is kneaded with an Opadar stone to smoothen the surface, allowing the paint to adhere better to the cloth. Just like the cloth, the brushes used by the painters are also handmade. For making brushes, hair from cow ears and buffalo necks is used. Natural colors derived from various resources are used in Phad painting. The technique of tempera is employed to create a beautiful Phad painting. When the painting begins, a sketch is first created with yellow color, and then gradually, each color is added. Red is obtained from Hinglu (cinnabar), green from plant-based sources (such as leaves or minerals), yellow from Haratal (orpiment), blue from Neel (indigo), and ochre (Gerua) is also used. To fix the colors, glue is applied.

Kavad Painting: Kavad painting is a unique form of mobile art in Rajasthan, which has been part of traditional folk art used in religious rituals. A Kavad is a wooden, portable shrine, and its doors are layered and interconnected. On these doors, a story is depicted in a sequential manner. These Kavads, which are associated with religious beliefs, primarily depict themes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. However, with time, the themes of Kavad paintings evolved, reflecting changes in society. This transformation is a natural process, as change is a fundamental part of life. The Bassi region of Chittorgarh district, famous for the creation of Kavad, currently has only a few artists who craft them. A Kavad is a temple that can be easily folded and transported from one place to another. This vibrant and living shrine, made from bright colors like red, green, yellow, etc., has the ability to attract anyone's attention. On its top, there is a statue of Lord Surya, which is a symbol of the Medapat kingdom. People from the Bhatt community wrap the Kavad in cloth and take it from village to village, where they perform chanting. The Kavad art depicts folk tales on eight to ten panels, which, at first glance, may not be easily understood. However, when the Kawadias (storytellers) sing in an enchanting voice and explain the meaning of the pictures, the images come alive, making them even more fascinating. As the story is narrated, the doors of the Kavad open, and people join their hands in prayer, offering money as a tribute to their gods. The religiously significant Kavad art still keeps the stories of Lord Ram and Krishna alive in rural areas. It is believed that Kavad painting is a 400-year-old tradition of storytelling. The Kavad painting is categorized based on the number of panels. A ten-panel Kavad has two panels representing Sheshnag (the serpent), while a door-shaped Kavad is known to have twelve panels. Kavad is traditionally made by the Khairadi community's carpenters. The entire Kavad is painted red, and mythological stories are painted on it in black. The carpenters carve the structure out of wood, then coat the entire frame with flat red color. Afterward, each figure is raised using yellow color, and once the figures are embossed, colors are filled in,

with yellow boundaries drawn. There was a time when natural hand prepared colors were used, but with time, chemical colors have replaced them.

Rajasthan has long been renowned globally for its art and culture. With the changing environment and modern advancements, the interests of the people here have also evolved. Despite some positive changes, the decline of traditional arts cannot be ignored. With changing lifestyles, many of Rajasthan's traditional folk arts are gradually fading away. It is essential to raise public awareness about the past glory and current challenges of these folk arts.



CONCLUSION

Folk art is an easy chapter to understand any culture. Instead of treating folk art forms as mere subjects in education, they should be integrated into practical learning experiences, allowing children, teachers, and researchers to appreciate their significance. Folk artists can be given a platform by involving them in practical activities.

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