UNIT 2 PAINTING

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous units you have studied about painting as one of the very significant visual arts. In this unit we will discuss about the art of painting, the techniques, materials used in the art of painting. We take this opportunity to learn the early phase of painting and what are the types of paintings that we come across and the ancient literature on Indian painting.

Objectives

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- understand the evolution and development of Indian painting;
- identify the ancient texts, techniques and elements of Indian painting;
- know the history of Indian painting;
- know the trends and approaches of painting after Indian independence.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Painting has been a very powerful medium of art in India. Painting as an art in India has a long heritage and history. The very early traces of painting can be seen in rock art. In the Indus period, the painted pottery had colourful patterns and designs. In the historical period painting was used as a means of communicating religious principles and also to narrate stories or incidents. In the medieval times painting acquired a very important position as an independent art.

There are references in our literature to the members of royal families learning painting. The royal courts patronised the talented individuals like painters, dancers, musicians and poets. The artists acquired respectable status and were honoured by the kings for
their artistic achievements. Emperor Akbar patronised Baswan, Khwaja Abdus Samad and many other artists. They are responsible for the development of Mughal Miniature School. We will study more about Mughal Miniature School in Unit -3. Let us study here the development of Indian painting in a chronological order.

2.2 EARLY PAINTING – ROCK ART

Rock Art belongs to the Stone Age which is generally assigned to the pre-historic period (the period for which there are no written records). Men in the Stone Age primarily depended on hunting, and gathering fruits, edible roots, honey and other things for their food. The Pre-historic men lived in natural shelters and caves. Their art was the representation of life around them. They painted the hunting scenes, wild and domesticated animals on the walls of their caves, rock shelters and boulders. Geometric forms, floral motifs and the imprint of the palm are other representations.

Rock Art is found in many parts of the world such as Europe, Africa, Australia, Russia and other parts of Asia including India. Many studies are being conducted in the field of ‘Rock Art’ all over the world. In India, scholars like V.S. Wakankar, S.K. Pande, Jagadish Gupta and others have discovered rock art primarily in the caves and rock shelters of Narmada Valley and Kaimur mountain ranges in central India. Later the painting of this period was discovered in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Gujarat, and Kerala. Among these UNESCO has recognised Bhimbetka as a World Heritage Site. These paintings are dated to 10,000-1,000 BC but the tribes of this area continued to paint till the eighteenth century.

The paintings are done in the style of line drawings; sometimes only the outline is heavily drawn. Otherwise hatched lines in different patterns are used to fill the figure. Colours were prepared out of mineral and natural vegetable substance mixed with animal fat or gum from trees. They directly applied this mixture of colours on the rock face to allow it to get into the pores of the rock. After a period of time the paintings become permanent. These paintings sometimes have a religious or magic purpose and sometimes is a natural expression of the world around them. Whatever the purpose of these paintings, the ‘Rock Art’ is the record of early man and his life. It is important to know that the instinct to paint is not just in modern man but was also very much with the caveman.

2.3 HISTORICAL PAINTING

With the establishment of Mauryan rule the historical period commences in India. Since then the dates and events have been recorded in the form of stone and copper plate inscriptions. But the paintings of Mauryan and Shung period are not yet discovered. Thus the earliest historical painting in India is attributed to the period of Satavahanas who ruled from 200 BC to 224 BC. In the historical period painting was used as a means of communicating religious principles and also to narrate a story or incident. In the medieval times painting acquired a very important position as an independent art.

The world famous Ajanta paintings have a long history. The earliest paintings at Ajanta in the Cave 9 and 10 are considered to belong to the time of Satavahanas. The Brahmi inscriptions of that period in these caves inform us about their rule over this area. Jataka stories concerning the life of Buddha are the subject matter of these paintings. Further during Gupta, Pallava, Chalukyan, Chola and Vijayanagar period the art of mural painting flourished. You will study mural paintings in detail in the second unit and about miniature schools of painting in the third unit.
Indian tradition attributes the origin of art to sage Narayana. He created the beautiful *apsara* Urvasi and also drew the beautiful picture of Urvashi. Then Narayana taught the visual arts to Vishvakarma, the celestial architect. He painted beautifully the entire universe. The first pictures were created by such painters. Further Vishvakarma created three-dimensional images - the sculptures and architecture. So Vishvakarma is considered the pioneer of Indian visual arts.

In India art has been handed down as a practising tradition from the most ancient times. The techniques and methods of art are found in written form in ancient texts. There are independent texts from early times for dance, music, sculpture and architecture. But we do not get an independent text on painting. However several texts contain a chapter on painting.

The texts which give information on the art of painting are:

*Chitrasutra* a chapter from *Vishnudharmottara*

*Naradiya shilpa*

*Abhilashitarthacintamani*

*Sarasvati shilpa*

*Chitralakshana*, a section from the 16th century text known as *Shilparatna*.

Even the episodes from Sanskrit literature provide a good deal of information on the art of painting. All information on drawing or sketching, colouring and making of a picture is given in these ancient texts. The oldest text is *Vishnudharmottara Puran* which belongs to 4th to 5th century AD. It contains an independent chapter on all art forms practised in India. The chapter on painting is known as *Chitrasutra*. This chapter is very valuable because it gives information on the classification of pictures, painting materials, merits and defects in painting etc.

### 2.5 INFORMATION IN THE LITERATURE

The above mentioned texts provide a good deal of information about the process and techniques in painting, preparation of colours and brushes.

#### 2.5.1 Shadangas – the six limbs of the art of Painting

a. *Rupabedha* – variety of form

b. *Pramana* - Proportion and size

c. *Bhavayojana* – the infusion of different emotions

d. *Lavanyayojana* – creating the lustre and retaining the freshness of colours

e. *Sadrusya* - bringing likeness in the form

f. *Varnikabhangas* – creating colour effects to bring the depth in the work.

A painting is created by using these six procedures. Once the subject is decided the artist starts thinking about how to put that in a figure, what types of forms (*Rupa*) are suitable for the subject. The forms are drawn on the surface with a proper understanding of the space. The forms are to be proportionate to the size of the given space. Then the forms are infused with the different emotions depending on the *rasa* of the picture.
What is conceived has to be in likeness to the image around us. For example when you
draw a chair and table as kept in a room they should look like a chair and table and not
something else. After drawing the sketches the different colours are mixed and painted.
While painting, care is to be taken not to create muddy patches but retain the freshness
of the colours.

2.5.2 Techniques of Colouring

The ancient texts give details on the ways of colouring a picture. There are three ways
of applying colours to the form drawn.

a. binduvartana – Vartana is shading, bindu is dot, so when the space is filled in
dots of different colours different shades are created.

b. raikhikavartana – rekha is line, filling the form with fine-line shading, this is
known as silver point.

c. pratavartana – applying different colours with wider brush work in cross-hatching
manner.

2.5.3 Colours and Emotions

Emotion is the soul of painting. In a figure painting the emotions give life to the portraiture.
For example in a scene where Buddha comes to his own house for alms (bhiksha), the
emotion in his face is serene filled with compassion and detachment. His wife with her
child Rahul on the door-step looks at him with a sense of pathos and Rahul looks at
Buddha in wonder. The artist has brought the emotions concerned to the subject in this
painting. In this way colours help in expressing the proper emotions in painting.

2.6 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have tried to view the development of painting as an art in various
periods of Indian history. So far we have learnt that, there were several texts which
discuss the techniques of painting, how a picture is to be painted. We also explored
how the painting was done in the very early stage of human development, the various
locations where rock art was executed, and the subjects of interest for the cave-men to
paint. In the historical phase we have many schools in mural painting and miniature
painting and manuscript painting.

2.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Self Assessment Questions 1

State whether the following statements are true or false. Write either T or F in
the boxes provided.

a) The literary references state that art was not patronised by the royal courts.

b) In the Indus period the painted pottery had colourful patterns and designs.

c) The rock shelters had the paintings of kings and queens.

d) The Brahmi inscriptions of that period in which tell us about the rule of Shatavahanas
over this area.

e) Indian tradition attributes the origin of painting to Raja Ravi Verma.
Self Assessment Questions 2

Match the items of the first column with those of the second. Write the number of the appropriate match in the bracket given in the first column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column I</th>
<th>Column II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) <em>Rupabedha</em></td>
<td>i) filling the form with fine-line shading, this is known as silver point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) <em>Pramana</em></td>
<td>ii) applying different colours with wider brush work in cross-hatching manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) <em>Bhavayojana</em></td>
<td>iii) variety of form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) <em>Raikhikavartana</em></td>
<td>iv) the infusion of different emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) <em>Patravartana</em></td>
<td>v) proportion and size</td>
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</tbody>
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2.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Write briefly on rock art painting.

2. Write a brief note on *shadangas*, the six limbs of Indian painting.

2.9 ANSWERS

Self Assessment Questions 1

1. a) F, b) T, c) F, d) T, e) F.

Self Assessment Questions 2

2. a) iii, b) v, c) iv, d) I, e) ii.

Terminal Questions

1. Rock Art belongs to the Stone Age which is a pre-historic period. The Pre-historic men lived in natural shelters and caves. Their art is the representation of life around them. They painted hunting scenes, wild and domesticated animals on the walls of their caves, rock shelters and boulders. Geometric form, floral motifs, the imprint of the palm are other representations. Rock art found in many parts of the world such as Europe, Africa, Australia, Russia and other parts of Asia including India.
UNESCO has recognised Bhimbetka as a World Heritage Site. These paintings are dated to 10,000-1,000 BC but the tribes of this area continued to paint till the eighteenth century.

2. **Shadangas are the six limbs of the art of Painting.**
   a. *Rupabedha* – variety of form,
   b. *Pramana* - Proportion and size
   c. *Bhavayojana* – the infusion of different emotions
   d. *Lavanyayojana* – creating the lustre and retaining the freshness of colours
   e. *Sadrusya* - bringing likeness in the form
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