

Mural Painting In India [Art And Culture For UPSC]

The history of Indian mural painting starts in ancient and early medieval times, from the 2nd century BC to 8th – 10th century AD. There are more than 20 locations around India containing murals from this period, mainly natural caves and rock-cut chambers. The different time periods also gave rise to different styles of mural painting that this article aims to highlight.

Introduction

- After Ajanta, very few sites with paintings have survived.
- In many places, sculptures were also plastered and painted.

Badami

- Example of later mural tradition.
- Badami was the capital of the western [Chalukyan dynasty](#).
- This dynasty ruled the area from 543 CE to 598 CE.
- Chalukya king Mangalesha patronised the excavation of the Badami caves.
- Mangalesha was the younger son of Pulakesi I and the brother of Kirtivarman I.
- Cave No. 4 is also known as the Vishnu Cave because of the dedication of the image of Vishnu. The date 578 – 579 CE is mentioned here. Thus, we get the period during which the cave was carved and also the Vaishnava leanings of the patron.
- Paintings depict palace scenes. A painting shows Kirtivarman seated in the palace and watching a dance scene with his wife and feudatories.
- The paintings are an extension of the mural painting tradition from [Ajanta](#) to Badami in south India.
- The faces of the king and queen are reminiscent of the modelling seen in Ajanta, with their eye-sockets large, eyes half-closed and protruding lips.
- These artists of the 6th century CE were able to create volume by contouring different parts of the face to create protruding structures of the face itself.

Murals under the Pallava, Pandava and Chola Kings

- The [Pallavas](#) succeeded the Chalukyas further south in Tamil Nadu.
 - They were great patrons of the arts.
 - Mahendravarman I (7th century) built many temples in Panamalai, Mandagapattu and Kanchipuram.
 - An inscription at Mandagapattu mentions the king Mahendravarman I with several titles such as Vichitrachitta (curious-minded), Chaityakari (temple-builder) and Chitrakar Puli (tiger among artists) – showing his interest in artistic activities.
 - Paintings at the temple at Kanchipuram were patronised by the Pallava king Rajasimha.
 - Painting of Somaskanda here – only traces remain – large, round face.
 - There is increased ornamentation in this period as compared to the previous.

- But, the depiction of the torso is much the same although a bit elongated.
- Pandyas also patronised art.
 - Examples: Thirumalapuram caves and Jaina caves at Sittanavasal.
 - Paintings are seen on the ceilings of the shrine, in verandas and on the brackets.
 - Dancing figures of celestial nymphs are seen.
 - Contours are in vermilion red and the bodies are painted yellow. Dancers have expressions on their faces and show supple limbs. Their eyes are elongated and sometimes protrude off the face. This is a distinctive feature seen in many later paintings in the Deccan and South India.
 - The Cholas ruled over the region from 9th to the 13th century CE.
 - The Cholas were at the height of their power in the 11th century CE and this is when their masterpieces appear.
 - Temples built during the reign of Rajaraja Chola and his son Rajendra Chola – Brihadeswara Temple at Thanjavur, at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, at Darasuram.
 - Chola paintings are seen in Narthamalai. Most important paintings are seen in the Brihadeswara Temple.
 - Two layers of paint were seen. The upper layer was executed during the Nayaka period (16th century). The Chola paintings (original layer) depict narrations and various forms of Lord Shiva, Shiva in Kailash, Shiva as Nataraja, as Tripurantaka. Also there is a portrait of Rajaraja, his mentor Kuruvar, etc.

The Cholas, Pandyas and the Cheras were the three dynasties that heralded the [Sangam Age](#), which was a time of a cultural renaissance that forever changed the economic, social and religious structure of South India. To know more in detail what were those changes click on the linked article.

Vijayanagara Murals

- After the Chola decline, the [Vijayanagara Dynasty](#) brought the region from Hampi to Trichy under its control.
- Hampi was the capital.
- Paintings at Thiruparankundram, near Trichy (14th century), represent the early phase of the Vijayanagara style.
- Virupaksha Temple at Hampi
 - Paintings on the ceilings of the Mandapa.
 - Depicting events from dynastic history and also from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.
 - Examples of paintings: portraying Vidyaranya, Bukkaraya Harsha's spiritual teacher carried in a palanquin in a procession; incarnations of Vishnu.
 - Faces and figures are shown in profile. Large frontal eyes, narrow waists.
- Lepakshi in Andhra Pradesh – paintings on the walls of the Shiva Temple.
- Features of Vijayanagara paintings:
 - Lines are still but fluid.
 - Faces are in profile.
 - Figures and objects are shown two-dimensionally.
 - These features were adopted by later artists such as those of the Nayaka Period.

Nayaka Paintings

- Extension of the Vijayanagara styles.
- 17th and 18th centuries.
- Seen in Thiruparankundram, Srirangam and Tiruvarur.
- Nayaka paintings showcase episodes of Mahabharata, Ramayana and Krishna Leela.
- In Thiruparankundram, paintings from two periods are observed – 14th and 17th centuries.
- The 14th-century paintings show scenes from the life of Mahavira.
- In Tiruvarur, there is a panel describing the story of Muchukunda.
- Sri Krishna Temple at Chengam, Arcot – 60 panels narrating the Ramayana. (Late phase of the Nayaka period).
- Male figures are shown with slim waists but less heavy abdomens.
- Painting of Nataraja at Thiruvananthapuram – good example of Nayaka art.

Kerala Murals (16th – 18th centuries)

- The distinct style was developed but a lot of the features of the Nayaka and Vijayanagara styles were adopted.
- The artists took ideas from the contemporary traditions of Kathakali and Kalam Ezhuthu.
- Vibrant and luminous colours, human figures have shown 3-dimensionally.
- Paintings on the walls of the shrines, on cloister walls of temples, also in palaces.
- The theme of the paintings – from locally popular episodes of Hindu mythology, local versions of the Mahabharata and Ramayana through oral traditions.
- More than 60 sites with mural paintings
 - Three palaces: Dutch Palace (Kochi), Krishnapuram palace (Kayamkulam), Padmanabhapuram palace (Travancore, now in Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu).
 - Pundareekapuram Krishna temple
 - Panayannarkavu (temple), Thirukodithanam
 - Sri Rama temple, Triprayar
 - Vadakkunnathan temple, Thrissur

Traditional forms of murals:

- Pithoro in parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- Mithila paintings, Mithila region, Bihar
- Warli paintings, Maharashtra

Topic: Mauryan Art and Architecture [Art & Culture Notes for UPSC]

Introduction

- Religions of the Shramana tradition, i.e., Jainism and Buddhism emerged around the 6th century BCE.

- The Mauryas had established themselves as a great power in the 4th century BCE and by the 3rd century, they had large parts of India under their control.
- At this time there were many modes of religious practices including the worship of Yakshas and mother-goddesses. Nevertheless, Buddhism became the most popular.
- After the Harappan civilization, monumental stone sculpture and architecture appears only in the Mauryan period.
- There were pillars, sculptures, rock-cut architecture, buildings like stupas, viharas and chaityas that served many purposes.
- They are exquisite in aesthetic quality and brilliant in their design and execution.

Mauryan Pillars and Sculptures

Pillars & Sculptures

- Erection of pillars was common in the Achaemenian Empire (Persian Empire) also. While there were commonalities like the use of polished stones, motifs like lotus, there are also differences.
- While the Achaemenian pillars were constructed in pieces, the Mauryan pillars were rock-cut, displaying the superior skill of the carver.
- Stone pillars can be seen all over the Mauryan Empire. These had proclamations inscribed on them and were used to spread the message of the Buddha by Emperor Ashoka.
- The top portion of the pillar is called capital and it typically has animal figures like bull, lion, elephant, etc.
- These capital figures are carved standing on a square or circular abacus.
- The abacuses are on the base which could be a stylised inverted lotus. Example of pillars with capital figures: Sarnath, Basarah-Bakhira, Rampurva, Sankisa and LauriyaNandangarh.
- The Lion Capital at Sarnath is the most famous example. Monumental figures of Yakshas and Yakshinis have been found in various parts of India thus showing the popularity of Yaksha worship.

Rock-cut architecture

- Ashoka also patronised rock-cut architecture. Rock-cut elephant at Dhauli, Odisha – shows modelling in round with linear rhythm. It also has an Ashokan edict.
- Lomus Rishi Cave – Rock-cut cave at Barabar Hills near Gaya. The cave entrance is decorated with a semicircle chaitya arch. An elephant is carved in high relief on the chaitya.
- The interior hall of the cave is rectangular; it also has a circular chamber at the back. Ashoka patronised this cave for the Ajivika sect.

Stupas, chaityas and viharas

- Stupas and viharas were constructed as part of the Buddhist and Jaina monastic tradition but

most of the constructions belong to Buddhism.

- Some Brahmanical gods were also represented in the sculptures here. Stupas were constructed over the relics of the Buddha at Rajagriha, Kapilavastu, Vaishali, Ramagrama, Allakappa, Pava, Vethadipa, Pippalvina and Kushinagar.
- Stupas consist of a cylindrical drum with a circular anda and a harmika and a chhatra on the top. Sometimes there were circumambulatory pathways and gateways.
- In many cases, additions were added in later centuries.
 1. Anda: hemispherical mound symbolic of the mound of dirt used to cover Buddha's remains (in many stupas actual relics were used).
 2. Harmika: square railing on top of the mound.
 3. Chhatra: central pillar supporting a triple umbrella form
- Stupa at Bairat, Rajasthan – 3rd century BCE; grand stupa with a circular mound and a circumambulatory path. Many stupas were built and not all of them with royal patronage.
- Patrons included lay devotees, gahapatis, guilds and kings. Not many mention the names of the artisans. But artisans' categories like stone carvers, goldsmiths, stone-polishers, carpenters, etc. are mentioned.
- Stupa at Sanchi – most famous and one of the earliest examples.
- Chaityas were basically prayer halls and most of them were with stupas. Generally, the hall was rectangular and it had a semi-circular rear end. They had horse-shoe shaped windows.
- They also had pillars separating the hall from the two aisles. Viharas were the residences of the monks.
- Both chaityas and viharas were made out of wood, and later were also stone-cut

Depiction of the Buddha

- In the early periods, Buddha is represented through symbols like footprints, lotus thrones, chakras, stupas, etc.
- Later on, stories were portrayed on the railings and torans of the stupas. These were mainly the Jataka tales.
- The chief events from Buddha's life which are narrated in the arts are birth, renunciation, enlightenment, first sermon (dharmachakrapravartana) and mahaparinirvana (death).
- The Jataka stories that find frequent depiction are Chhadanta Jataka, Sibi Jataka, Ruru Jataka, Vessantara Jataka, Vidur Jataka and Shama Jataka.
- Were of various shapes disc-shaped, cylindrical, spherical, barrel-shaped, and segmented.