



International Journal of Home Science

ISSN: 2395-7476
IJHS 2018; 4(2): 260-262
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www.homesciencejournal.com
Received: 04-03-2018
Accepted: 06-04-2018

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Miniature painting: A royal art of Rajasthan

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Abstract

This study attempts to understand and document the techniques and motifs employed in Rajput Miniature Painting in context of their ritualistic and socio-cultural significance. The study documents traditional and present techniques of Miniature Painting and the traditional designs in relation to their religious and philosophical significance. It was found that Miniature Painting, which essentially derives its theme from the rich heritage of the Mughal and Rajput Royal lives, were previously done on leafs, metal sheets, stones and are now practiced on other mediums such as paper and fabric such as silk and cotton. The raw materials, techniques and motifs used for creating these beautifully detailed paintings are recorded. The paper concludes with the new range of products being made as per the market demand.

Keywords: Paintings, miniature, Rajput painting, silk fabric, shell, Gond, hakik-ka-pathar, kadiya, varakh

1. Introduction

Paintings are basically an art form that has flourished in India from early times as is evident from the remains that have been discovered in the caves, and the literary sources. Rajput painting, also known as Rajasthani Painting, is a style of Indian paintings developed and flourished during the 18th century in the royal courts of Rajasthan (3). Miniature painting is one of the most popular and remarkable Rajput paintings of India. These are beautiful hand made paintings which are quite colour full but small in size (Seetharaman 2016) ^[1]. The highlight of these paintings is the intricate and delicate brushwork, which lands them a unique identity. These paintings narrated the subjects like the Mughal and Rajput prince's royal lives, their costumes, war scenes, their cultural and religious practices and much more (Tondon, 1981) ^[2].

2. Rajput Miniature Paintings

Rajput painting, also known as Rajasthani Painting, is a style of Indian paintings developed and flourished during the 18th century in the royal courts of Rajasthan. The Rajput painting was traditional in its approach and dealt with themes from Indian epics, romantic Vaishnava literature and musical codes from Ragas and Raginis. Sometimes, under the influence of the Mughal tradition, artists also drew scenes from courtly life and the portrait of contemporary personages. Rajasthan has played a significant role in the growth of Indian art. Like other fine arts, paintings flourished widely in this region and established a distinct form called Rajasthani Paintings.

2.1 Raw Material Used

1. Fabric

Miniature Paintings are mainly done on the fabric as a base. Commonly used fabrics for the paintings are silk and cotton. The most preferred fabric used for miniature painting is silk as it gives a smooth texture which gives a rich look to the painting and the movement of the brush becomes easier.

2. Brush

Brushes are made with squirrel hair. There are many types of brushes used for painting a miniature. The thicker ones are used for filling colour and the thinner ones for borders. Finest brushes are required for detailed and intricate work.

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3. Shell

Shells are used as pallets as it provides a smooth surface to mix the colours. Colours are mixed with the help of fingers.

4. Hakik ka Pathar

It is burnishing stone which is rubbed onto the base of the painting (at the preparatory level) to make it smooth. This enhances the surface quality for smooth movement of brush and hence supports fine quality painting.

5. Gond

It is mixed with the colour which is in powder form.

6. Colour

Different stones (minerals) and metals are used to obtain colours. These stones are crushed to pieces and grinded into a powder form which is finally filtered to achieve a good quality colour.

2.2 Technique

1. Preparation of The Base

The commonly used base for the painting is fabric which is washed to remove the finishes from the surface. After drying the fabric is either dyed or bleached according to the requirement. The usual colours in which the fabrics are dyed are ivory, golden, black and beige.

After drying, the fabric is coated with a mixture of *Kadiya* and *Gond*. *Kadiya* is a soft stone from which white colour is obtained. This mixture is prepared by dipping *Kadiya* in water

for 4-5 hours to dissolve. It is then filtered through sieve and mixed with *Gond*. This paste provides strength and better surface to the base of the painting.

The other bases such as marble, postcards, acrylic etc. are used directly without any such preparations as their surface is naturally smooth to paint on.

2. Obtaining the Colours

Available stones are grounded on a stone slab to form powder. The stones are crushed depending upon the required quantity of colour. This powder is dissolved in water along with the *Gond* (gum) and then filtered. The filtration process is continued till the colour becomes totally free from any form of lumps or any particles.

3. Painting

An outline of the sketch is made on the base (fabric, paper, or any other as discussed earlier) with the help of a pencil. Thereafter the smaller character such as figures, trees, and others are made. Sketches are drawn with a light pencil so that marks are not visible after the application of the colour. Once the sketch is complete application of colours starts by filling the base colour and then followed by details. Shading and fine detailing of face and other characters are done at the end with fine brush. Face and facial expression are most important part of the painting and therefore done with utmost precision and patience. *Varakh* (gold paint) is applied at the borders, garments and jewellery of god, goddesses, kings and queens. Once embellished, the painting is allowed to dry properly.

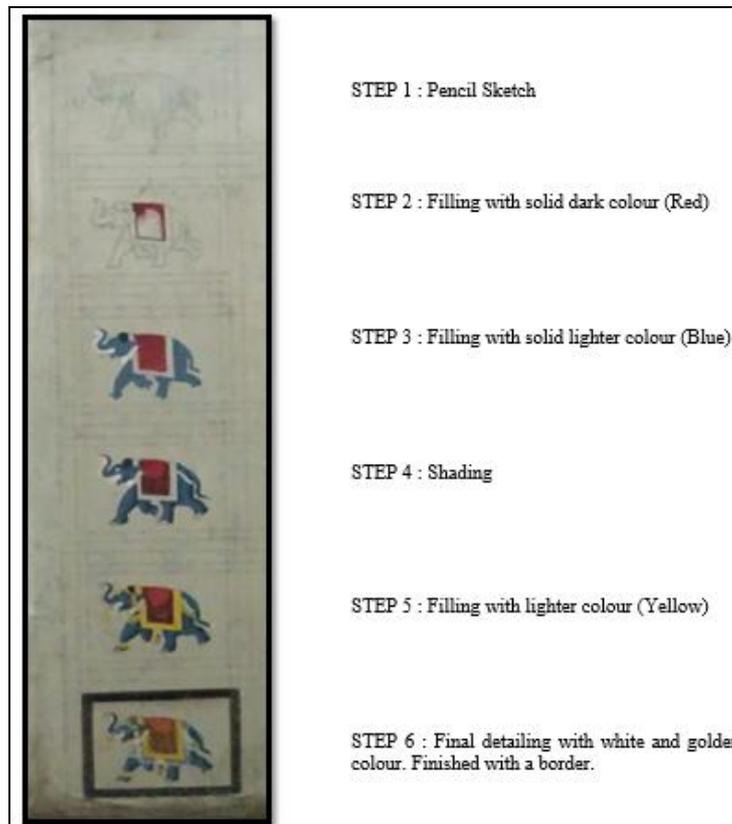


Fig 1: Steps in making a miniature painting

2.3 Motifs

The main theme of these paintings is the traditional text that ranges from the Ragamala, Krishna Leela, the Ramayana and the Bhagvata Purana. Udaipur Palace is one of the popularly used theme in this painting. Various scenes in and around the

Palace are beautifully painted, depicting the events. Animals such as: elephants, horses and camels having significant meanings of luck, power and love respectively, are widely used.



Fig 2: Rajput Miniature Painting show casing Udaipur Palace



Fig 3: Horse (Power)



Fig 4: Elephanta (Luck)



Fig 5: Camel (Love)

labour involved is too high. There fore, it is not very popular in the domestic market, but is highly valued in the export market. To keep this art flourishing, product diversification has taken place. Smaller articles are prepared maintaining the intricacy and royalty of the art form. Other products usually made are postcard paintings, coasters, notebook and greeting cards.

3. Conclusions

- Indian paintings are unique in their own way and yet draw inspirations from various religious and cultural influences of the era and location it originated from. Rajput paintings are known for depiction of natural beauty and scenic landscapes. They are also famous for depicting life episodes of Hindu deity Lord Krishna. These miniatures have exquisite portrayal of love, passion and emotion. They cover all sorts of Hindu mythologies such as themes of Ramayana and events form Mahabharata.
- The fabric used for this painting is silk. The other materials used as base are marble, acrylic and paper. The brushes of miniature paintings are very unique since they are handmade using squirrel hair and shells are used as the pallets. Natural colours are used which are obtained from different stones by grinding them.
- Originally worked as a wall painting it has now been diversified into smaller range of products such as post card, notebooks, etc., for the forgien and domestic market. The painting being very expensive due to the patience, intricacy and time taken was not fetching good returns. Hence, product diversification has helped in keeping alive the efforts and uniqueness of this art.

4. References

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2.4 Products

Miniature paintings are widely available as wall hangings. This art form is very expensive as the hardwork and hours of