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AESTHETICS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF JAIN MINIATURE PAINTINGS

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes about the Jain manuscript Illustration and characteristics of the Jain paintings from 12th century to 16th century from Palm leaves to cloth period. Further it is discussed the historical background to evolution to the mature stage that occupied a unique chapter in Indian miniature painting tradition. Due to the change of formats such as paper and cloth one can notice gradual changes in terms of use of style, colours, and compositions. The early period of paintings is limited to Jain Thirthankaras only. Later jain themes Kalpasuthra and Kalakacharyakatha were the prominent themes , background remains always suggestive mode rather than in details. Jain painters adopted contemporary textile designs into their work. It has unique features like swollen chest and protruding eye and pointed chin and angularity in human figures with certain mudras. Gradually in the cloth period the complexity in composition and number of images and modulations in colours and adding new colours with dazzling border decorations.

KEY WORDS: *Jain, Kalpasuthra, Kalakacharyakatha, Apabramsha, protruding eye, angularity.*

INTRODUCTION

During ancient time's paintings was a favorite mode of expression in Art, it has attained excrescence in terms of aesthetics as well as technical standards with support of the contemporary literature on painting. With the evidence of the Jain literature, that there were the painters' ateliers established to promote art. Art guilds were encouraged with commission works to enrich palaces and temples with beautiful paintings. Not only men but the women also acquired proficiency in master art of painting to express their feelings in the palaces. India must have produced a great deal of paintings as a result of the preference for painting. The perishable nature of materials like wood, plaster, and linen, along with the iconoclastic destruction of Muslim kings, led to such extensive destruction over time that it is possible to count the number of Indian paintings on one hand.

Jain style of painting was established in the present areas like Gujarat, Malwa, Rajasthan. *Kalapasuthra* and *Kalakacharya Katha* were popular jain texts illustrated repeatedly throughout the jain period of art. *Rishabhadeva* was the first *Thirthankara* of the Jains, credited with creating the concept of Jain painting. Similar to Buddhist monks, Jain monks were not been allowed to reside in homes enriched with artwork in the past. The *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* emphasized that a Jain monk should not like to live in beautiful houses, adorned with paintings, fumigated and performed with fragrance of flower garlands, and fitted with doors with enriched ceilings. Further a monk should not look at a woman either in life or in a painted portrait. It was known In *Brihat Kalpasutra* , prohibition was imposed on monks and nuns entertain the art of painting. In the later times the subject of painting has been classified into two kinds such as *Nirdosa-chithra* and *Sadosa Chithra*. Nirdosa chithra means a pure painting which consists painting of trees, mountains, rivers, buildings, creepers, flowers, purnakalasa, swastika etc. *Sadosa-chithra*, which translates to "impure painting," refers to the depiction of common ladies or flying goddesses. However, when Jain bhandaras appeared as the archives for Jain art in the Middle Ages, the relaxation was granted to associate with art.

Until Dr. A. Coomaraswamy's article in 1914 on Jain miniature Paintings, it was very little known about Jain painting to the public. His publication of Catalogue of the Indian collections in the museum of Fine Arts, Boston has given great impetus to many scholars like N.C Mehta, O.C. Ganguly, M R. Majumdar , Ajith Ghose. They came forward for much more research and throwing light on the technical and aesthetic standards of the Western Indian paintings. The outstanding work of Sarabhai Nawab, *Jaina Chithra Kalpadruma* in Gujarti, has revealed to us previously undiscovered illustrated manuscripts concealed in the most inaccessible in 1935 from Jaina Jnana Bhandars.(Moti Chandra 1948)

The introductory essay in *Jaina –Chitra kalpadruma* is an informative mine of on the art of palm leaf, paper, cloth and methods of preparing of various kinds of colours, inks and the existence of Jaina Bhandars. The discovery of the painted wooden book covers by Muni Jaina Vijayaji from the famous Jaina Bhandar at Jaisalmer has gave more knowledge on story of western Indian painting. Dr. Moti Chandra, the curator of Princes of Wales Museum, Bombay has examined to afresh the material that was published by Dr. Norman Brown and Sarabhai Nawab. They noticed that it was not considered as individual movement of art, confined to Gujarat but a part of common art movement in India. For comprehensive understanding of western

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Indian Paintings, it is an essential to acquire knowledge in technical process involved in. the *Manasollasa* the work of twelfth century A.D. work gives us enough knowledge in the contemporary painting. In which there is a full description of colour formulas founded by *Muni Punya Vijayaji*. Dr. Moti Chandra has studied rich material of western Indian costumes and textile designs through the paintings. It has been noticed that Twelfth century people in western India wore sleeveless blouses, jackets, shorts, dhotis, the women wore choli, saris, Scarves. The design of skirts make the appearance, used by the court dancers in fourteenth and fifteenth century A.D.

Historical Background and Origin

On par with other religions in India, Jain teachings were passed in oral tradition. Later Jains noticed and realized the limitation of this oral traditions after a massive famine in Gujarat in the Fifth century A.D.. The famine resulted significant loss of many of the Jain monks and Jain folklore. Then Jains started transcribing their teachings and drafted their canonical texts but it was only after 8th century the commissioning manuscripts gathered momentum. Till tenth century palm leaf manuscripts were in vogue without an illustrations later they took inspiration from Buddhist palm leaf manuscript illustrations on with illustration doesn't have any link with text and were purely for iconographic purpose.in the earliest jain manuscripts figures and deities were present for magical grounds rather than visualization. Illustrations in the Twelfth century A.D. has standard iconographical schemes and eventually narrative illustrations took place in the Thirteenth century A.D



Fig. 1 One of a Pair of Jain Manuscript Covers (Patli), Gujarat, early 12th Century.
Image Credit : John Guy, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Patronage of Art

Jainism was patronized by various kings and dynasties chiefly Solanki rulers of Western India, Chalukyan Kings who ruled Gujarat were great contributors of manuscript illustrations. And kings of Rajasthan and Malwa regions form tenth century to thirteen century were great patrons for Jainism and its art through the building numerous temples, libraries, it is believed king Sidharaja Jayasimha (1094 A.D - 1143A.D.) employed 300 scribes and illustrators in order to reproduce books and manuscripts. His successor King Kumara Pala (1143 - 1174) established 21 Jain Libraries (Goswamy, 2016). After decline of Solanki dynasty, this region was disturbed by the plunders of Islamic troops during 13th and 14th centuries. Several temples were demolished under the destruction of Muslim kings like Aladdin Khilji's conquest of Gujarat in 1299.(Pal, P.1999). During that time temple wall paintings and banners were lost their existence. These palm leaf manuscripts were transported to safest areas in the remote areas of Rajasthan, Patan, and Ahmedabad. The Jain merchants and bankers lower their activity of patronizing temples building encouraged manuscript illustrations with containing the name of the donors with date.

The introduction of paper in late 13th century, artist was liberated in articulating pictorial elements to their degree of freedom. In result a huge number of manuscripts were commissioned with new dimensions. Many changes occurred in the formats and compositions, colours and details in figuration.

From Eleventh century to Sixteenth century A.D, Gujarat region was raised as the chief center of calico printing and exported printed calico to African and Asian countries. But Textile material evidence are not survived during this period. In Paintings only one can find the evidence of material for textile designs, colours and patterns were employed by the textile designers. Jaina painters adopted textile designs from the contemporary society and supported the printed Calico designs discovered in Egypt. Precious records on the western Indian school of palm leaf and cloth paintings were irretrievably destroyed during these turbulent and stressful times. Thankfully, Swetambara Jaina Gnana bandaras have preserved a portion of this type of western Indian art.

Nomenclature

Both the palm leaf illustrated manuscripts and paper illustrations, paintings on cloth, and painted wooden book covers dating from Twelfth century and onwards are mostly found in Jain collections. The earliest evidences of paintings were availed in large number and appeared from Swetambara jnana bhandars in Gujarat. For this reason this style of paintings are known as *Jain, Swetambara Jain and Gujarat*. In order to avoid the contravarsary, Mr. Sarabhai Nawab has designated these paintings as *Gujarat school* under the patronage of Jains. Rai Krishnadasa called it as *Apabramsha style*. Dr. A.K.Coomaraswamy was the first person who designated them as Jain paintings later along with NC Mehta called these as Gujarati school (Coomaraswamy 1927).

Apabramsha Style

The term *Apabramsha*" means *corrupted or mixed* or blend of different artistic styles of during that time (Lahoti, S. 2024). The subject matter is purely ascribed to Jain religious themes. The

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western Indian painting style belongs to Jains origins mainly in Gujarat, Malwa, Rajasthan under the region of Chalukya dynasty of Solanki Kings who were strong patrons of Jainism. Paintings on the lives of Jain *Thirthankaras* notably *Parshvanatha* and *Mahavira* and Narrative stories of *Kalpasutra, Kalakacharya Katha* are characterized by sharp and angularity of nose, fish shaped eyes, double chins, and faces were drawn in three quarter profiles with protruding eye in to the space, pointed noses painted with basic primary and natural colours like indigo, red, yellow and red ochers colours on palm leaves and later shifted to paper. Its later phase is characterize by intricate details of jewellery, accessories and textile designs on garments.

The *Vasanta Vilasa*, a painted scroll of 1451 A. D called as native Jain style. Finally after the study of Vasanta Vilasa, he said there nothing special in calling as Jain , which has common characteristics of folk art which was vogue in western India. Rai Krishnadasa in his *Bharatiya Chithrakara* as disagrees the concept or label of Jain Painting. The characteristics of Jain miniature paintings can be studied under two significant phases.

Illustrated Palm Leaf manuscript Period: (1150 A.D – 1350A.D)

The earliest Jain paintings are illustrated Palm leaf manuscript and book covers during 11th to 12 th centuries A.D. Initially palm leaves were processed under three steps such boiled, dried, trimmed. Then the long folios were stacked together to form a book and protected by wooden cover known as *patlis*. The folios were flipped over horizontally and text can be read from left to right in direction. The blank spaces were left by the scribe for the artists to draw illustration. The text was written in Prakrit language, a variant of *Devanagari* script chosen for Jain texts specifically.



Fig. 2. Leaf from a Jain Manuscript: Kalpa-sutra: text (verso), 1278.
Western India, Gujarat, 13th century. Opaque watercolor and ink on palm leaf;
Manuscript 2; overall: 5.7 x 18.4 cm (2 1/4 x 7 1/4 in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art

Before the advent of paper to India, Palm leaves and birch bark were commonly used for manuscript writing and illustrations. The illustrated palm leaf manuscripts can be divided into two categories. The manuscripts executed between 1100A.D to 1350 A.D comes under the first group and latter group comes under the period 1350A.D - 1450 A.D when paper replaced the palm leaf. The earliest illustrated manuscript is *Nisitachurni* of 1100 A.D and *Shatkhandagama* (1113 A.D -1120A.D) a religious text of the Digambara Jains. These are just decorative roundels filled with geometrical and floral patterns and there are a few figure drawings. It remarkable with emphasis on linear quality but protruding eye the typical feature of western Indian painting not appears, but *thribhanga* pose seems adopted from the contemporary Indian sculpture. Five miniature from the palm leaf manuscript of Kalpasutra and Kalakacharya Katha dated 1219 A.D followed the iconographic prototypes of the earlier period. In 23 miniature paintings in the palm leaf manuscripts *Subahukatha* and other stories dated 1279 A.D, we notice the representation of flora and fauna for the first time in Jain miniatures. In these miniature it has been noticed the evolved style of Jain paintings. Both male and female figures are depicted with narrow waist and broad shoulders with various types of ornamentation. Angularity in drawing and characteristics such as pointed nose and chin and farther eye protruding into the space. Ghose, 1927 defined the prudent eye as the fundamental desire to depict a statue on plain canvas. Doshi(1985) claimed physiognomy of Mongolian race with the farther protruding eye was demanded by the subject of *Kalakacharya katha* that monk *Kalakacharya* travelled beyond the Indus to ask for the aid of Sahi kings for the battle against the enemy. Coomaraswamy(1930). mentions representation of eye brow results in extended eyes as far as Ellora paintings concern which the same feature appeared after seven centuries in the same religion paintings. The element of protruding eye carry forward of Ellora features continued till 14th century A.D. which was popular among the Swetambara school of Jainism. And there is no attempt for modelling in colour but just remained flat patches of bright palette. In the first category of illustrated palm - leaf manuscripts shows that the subject matter of the paintings were restricted to the representation of Thirthankaras, gods, goddesses, monks, patrons male and female figurines with limited list of subjects with poses worth more or less iconographic. The painter never bothered of compositional aspects like grouping, and perspective. But rarely the figures in the composition not exceeded to four only. They strictly conventional. Jinas showed with sitting posture with cross legs depicted in full view. The knees and hip joints are shown as rigid and erect, and the face is sketched

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in three quarter profile with the eye protruding and further checked. For standing figures, the thribhanga pose was vogue and noteworthy element of mediaeval sculpture—has been adapted with elegant curves. There are two types of sitting positions. The first is sitting on a foot stool with both legs crossed, The second kind is the left leg is crossed and right leg is allowed to dangle. Graceful gesture were shown as anjali mudra in which mudra both hands are folded and joined together to offer respect to gods and teachers. The gesture of discussion in which the thumb is joined with first fingers known as *Vitarka* (arhument). Varada mudra in which hand is stretched down ward with the palm turned and fingers stretched outward. The broad shoulders and narrow hips are the chief characteristics. The chest of both men and women are shown as full. Women breasts were full arched and fully developed. Three quarter profile view of the face and protruding were not prominent in the later period of paper. In the earlier palm leaf illustrated manuscripts , line is very angular, appears as flat and lack of depth. Crude modelling of figure of the certain parts with slight colour washes. This has restricted colours like yellow, blue, vermillion white and green. The background is filled with vermillion of brick red in the entire history of Jain painting, sometimes red is displaced with blue in paper period. The Jain miniature are lacks landscapes and architectural settings, but *Subahukatha* dated 1208 A.D holds rudimentary landscape with limited and conventional animals and trees.



Fig. 3 Illustration from the Kalpasutra and Kalakacharya Katha manuscript
Western India. Circa 1375 CE
Image Credit :Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai.

Miniatures in the Paper Period: (1400 -1600)

The second group of palm- leaf paintings took turn with the establishment of Islamic rule in Gujarat region, roughly begun from 1350 A.D to 1450 AD. With the introduction of paper, the drawing became very fine in quality. The limited range of subject matter of the earlier period was enriched with narrative episodes. The colour tonality is developed and Persian cultural influence is also deep rooted with calligraphy, areal perspective, high finishing and adding Gold and ultramarine brought the charm to the paper period.

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Fig.4.Devananda's Fourteen Auspicious Dreams Foretelling the Birth of Mahavira: Folio from a Jaunpur Kalpasutra Manuscript , 1465A.D. Image Credit : John Guy, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Balagopala stuti of Bilvamangala of 13th century A.D describe additional elements than *Kalpasutra* and *Kalakacharya* in terms of composition and wider foliage and decoration, number of birds, animals, and profound use of architectural settings with refined drawing, new type of scenes. In the later version of *Balagopala stuti*, one can notice an attempt of shading human faces, costumes, architectural settings. Lines became thick and angular. The series of *Gita Govinda* reflects the refined style of western Indian miniature painting.

The Kalpasutra and *Kalakacharyakatha* manuscript dated 1427 A.D were highly decorated. It 's 113 folios were written in glittered silver against black and red backgrounds and a few pages were written in the gold against red background. The borders were enriched with animal processions, and floral motifs. Sometimes borders painted with blue, vermillion, crimson, and brick red. Composition on these miniature is done one combination of Vermillion and red back ground and ultramarine blue, carmine, gold, green were elaborately used. The treatment of woman figures carefully finished and represented as Indian woman in the early Mughal period.



Fig. 5 The Battle between Bahubali (Balarama) and Bharat Painted wooden book cover (Patli) Jain School, Western India, 12th century Image courtesy: HareKrsna.com

After introduction of paper for calligraphy and illustrations in western India, the technical process of painting took many changes in its style. The varied sizes of paper which provided larges areas and more convenient to painter rather than palm leaf manuscript illustrations. The scope in the usage of paper has increased and allowed the artists degree freedom from wider composition with more details. That is why in the paper period, we can see the illustrations with finer border decorations. Even a radical change took place in application of colours. The yellow painted in palm leaf illustrated manuscripts, was replaced by use of gold colour. The use of ultramarine blue was lavishly seen for covering backgrounds. A new shade of colour between caramine and vermillion appeared as the favorite colour of the artist. But the elaborate use of gold has declined the aesthetic appeal.

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Fig. 6 Birth of Parshva, Folio 45 (recto), from a Kalpa-sutra, c. 1500.
Western India, Gujarat, late 15th-early 16th century.
Gum tempera, ink, and gold on paper; overall: 12.5 x 25.7 cm
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Edward L. Whittemore Fund 1932.119.45.a

Painting on Cloth

The woven fabric with rough surface was used as a medium or base for painting during medieval India. The *Kama sutra* also mentioned painting on cloth. In the *Visuddhimagga*, cloth material was mentioned as the base support for painting activity. The *Panchadhasi* of *Madhavacharya* has discussed the found conditions of canvas painting. The canvas has to be soaked in water, burnished, illustration drawn up on and then colored. Despite several allusions to painting on fabric in ancient India, no examples of canvas paintings of this type were discovered until the fourteenth century A.D. This could be explained by the perishable nature of textiles and the foreign invaders' destruction of books and art treasures. From the availed earliest cloth paintings belongs to the fourteenth century A.D, two paintings are with magical figures of Jaina gods and tantric cult *Tharunaprabhacharya* (Chintamani Yantra) dated 1354 A.D and *Bhavadeva Suri* (Surimantra pata dated 1355 A.D) and third one is *Samgrahini Thippanaka Pata* (dated 1396 AD). The *Vasantha Vilasa* is the first document is purely secular subject.



Fig. 7. A Jain pata of Sahasraphana Parshvanatha, Gujarat.
15th century, Opaque watercolor on cloth

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CONCLUSION

Jain paintings has created a visual language that was simple and delineative . All the Jain miniature in square shaped illustrations. Their appearance is purely decorative in character. To illustrate different instances, the area was separated into different compartments. The gods and goddesses can easily recognized as they are holding weapons in their hands and their vehicles otherwise all the figure seems as same. The depiction of woman in early Jain paintings seems as if they adopted the features from the ancient Indian sculptures with highly adorned jewellery and clothes. The palette is often bright and strongly influenced from the textile designs of contemporary life. The three dimensionality in face achieved by the idea of producing eye into space. Thin and wiry and sharp angular lines predominated the compositions. The political existence of sultans in regions of *Mandu, Gujarat, Patan* were revealed by the architectural elements like pointed arches and domes. Features of landscapes are very suggestive. From 1350 A.D to 1450 A.D., it seems most creative phase and celebrated time of Jain paintings. One can notice a shift from iconic representation to attractive scenes, figures, and dance poses, landscapes etc. musicians, musical instruments. It is noticed that in the Jain mini miniatures male figures are dominated but woman figures have distinct place as a part of Jain puranas comparatively less than men. We see female figure as the mother of Thirthankaras, queens, court women, dancers, maids etc., the fish shaped eye elevated the feminine beauty. The lavish border decorations in *Kalpasutras* describes how shows that the western Indian painters in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were good textile designers.

The introduction of the paper lead the artists to expand the creative horizons of the Jain paintings. The clothes, gilding, and other decorations were identical to those found in Jaina and Vaishnavite texts from the earlier eras. Some aspects of the social life of modern western India have been documented and preserved by artists. With distinct features and style mainly protruding eye, strong backgrounds and textile designs jain paintings has itself occupied a place, emerged as a style and distinguished school in the history of traditional Indian Painting.

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