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PHAD PAINTING: A FOLK HERITAGE EXEMPLIFYING THE REMARKABLE SYNERGY OF DEVOTION, DEDICATION, AND COMMITMENT

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ABSTRACT

This research paper provides information on the Phad painting practised traditionally in Shahpura sub-division, located in the eastern part of Bhilwara district. This painting has been carried out for approximately seven centuries by painters of the Joshi clan in a specific family within Shahpura sub-division. Phad represents a cultural heritage that signifies the extraordinary synergy between the devotion of the painters and the dedication of its narrators. The paper describes the colours and techniques used in Phad painting, along with changes over time in its form and subjects. It encompasses all aspects of Phad painting, such as its history, relevance, challenges faced by its painters, and suggestions for its preservation. The paper is based on information gathered from primary and secondary sources.

KEYWORDS: *Phad Painting, Handicraft, Shahpura, Bhilwara, Phad Narration, Joshi, Painter, Bhopa, Pabuji, Devnarayanji.*

INTRODUCTION

Painting is an innate skill present in every individual. Everyone engages in painting at some stage of life. It serves as a powerful medium for expressing thoughts and emotions. While linguistic communication requires knowledge of the language, painting establishes dialogue without such necessity. This is why prehistoric cave paintings are known as 'pictography or picture writing or silent language'.

The figures carved by a small child on the walls of the house give an idea of his childhood feelings. Tribal communities mark their bodies with various figures to display lineage and culture and create 'clan symbols or totems' at their main doorways. Body markings are popular among today's youth as 'tattoo art'. A nation's flag or a political party's symbol reflects its ideology and principles. Mascots in sports events convey the purpose and sporting spirit. Government departments and industries use 'logos or trademarks' to establish unique identities.

Various states in our country have traditional painting styles, including Bihar's Madhubani, Maharashtra's Warli, Bengal's Kalighat, Kerala's Mural and Andhra Pradesh's Kalamkari, all world-renowned. In Rajasthan's context, traditional painting has been a distinctive identity for centuries. Women create Mandna, Sanjhi and Rangoli on walls and courtyards during festivals and celebrations. Over the time, this art moved from homes to professional painters, evolving into refined forms. These professionals gave rise to styles like Marwari, Bikaneri, Bundi, Mewar, Chawand, Jaipur and Kishangarh. A glimpse of regionalism is visible in all these painting styles and this is the main basis for differentiating them. Recognizing the importance of painting, the rulers and landlords of the state provided patronage and encouragement to painters during their respective eras. It is due to the skill of these painters and the encouragement they received from the ruling class that Rajasthan holds a leading position in the field of painting.

Phad Painting

The 700-year-old Phad painting from Shahpura town in Bhilwara district, Rajasthan, exemplifies local traditional art (Basu, 2020, p. 12). Local skilled painters keep this cultural heritage alive. Literally, 'Phad' means 'screen or cloth'. As it is done on cloth or canvas, it is called Phad painting (Sharma & Kumar, 2023, pp. 310–333). It depicts tales of deities and heroic sagas using various colours on cloth or canvas.

The history of Phad painting started from the family of Chhipa *Chiteras* (painters) of Joshi Gotra of Shahpura (K. Joshi, personal communication). This art continued to be transmitted systematically from generation to generation in this family. This art got real recognition on the national stage when on 29 March 2006 President of India Dr. A.P.J. Kalam awarded Padma Shri to renowned Phad painter Shreelal Joshi of Shahpura, Bhilwara (Handmade in Rajasthan Department, n.d.). Parvati Devi Joshi, born in Gangapur town of Bhilwara district, received training in Phad painting after marriage in the Joshi family of Shahpura and established herself as a skilled Phad painter and the first female Phad painter of Rajasthan (Shukla, 2022., p. 17).

Techniques Used in Phad Painting

Handloom cotton cloth is used for Phad painting, which is soft and finely woven. It is coated with maize flour paste or starch and dried in sunlight to stiffen. Instead of synthetic fibre brushes, brushes made from mongoose and squirrel tail hair in

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various sizes are used. These natural brushes are softer and more flexible than synthetic ones (S. Soni, personal communication).

First of all, shapes are carved on the cloth with black paint which is called *kachcha* or raw (Rajvanshi & Shrivastava, 2013, p. 748). After this it is filled with bright colors. According to the famous painter Shri Kalyan Joshi, in Phad painting, chemical colors are not used and handmade natural colors are used. Means, red from *hinglu*, black from *kajal*, white from zinc oxide, blue from indigo, saffron from *sindoor* (vermilion) and green from *jungaal* (green rust on copper or copper hydroxide) (Joshi, 2012, p. 12). These are mixed with tree gum using fingers in a process called 'colour grinding' (N. Soni, personal communication, December 6, 2022). The mixture is strained through fine cloth for easy adhesion. Colours are symbolic: black for demons or villains, white for virtuous persons or saints, red for gods, blue for goddesses; sindoor and red denote valour (Niraj & Sharma, 2008, p. 158).

Types and Subjects of Phad

Phad is made in two forms: horizontal and vertical, typically 3×4 sq. ft. or 2×4 sq. ft. These depict folk tales featuring folk deities. The most popular in Rajasthan is Pabuji Rathore's Phad (Sharma & Mishra, 2019, pp. 16–24). Devnarayanji's phad is the longest with 170 sq. ft. area (Mahawar, 2018, p. 252). Tejaji's Phad emphasises snakes, as he is the 'snake deity' (Gupta, 2020). In Phad painting, the entire life character of the folk deity or any part or incident from his life is depicted. Generally, pictures of Ganapati, Riddhi-Siddhi and Saraswati are made on the top left corner of the canvas. The base remains uncoloured. The special fact is that in Phad painting only one side of the face is shown. Apart from all this, pictures related to nature are also given a special place in Phad, such as banana leaves, flowers and leaves, fruit trees, creepers, birds, camels, elephants, horses etc.

Phad Narration

A Phad painter's devotion gets completed only when the emotions in the paintings reach the public. For this, the role of *Bhopas and Bhopis* becomes very important. Actually, Bhopa and Bhopis are professional Phad reciters who go from village to village and recite Phad among the common people. Bhopa-Bhopis wear special red attire for reciting the Phad. Generally, Bhopa and Bhopis use different types of musical instruments while reciting the Phad of each folk deity. For example, *Ravanahatha* is played in Pabuji's Phad, *Jantar* is played in Devnarayan Ji's Phad and *Deru* is played in Gogaji's Phad (Vyas, 2019, p. 94). Phad is also recited using an instrument called *Maat*, especially during the singing of Pabuji's *52 Pavadas* (Indian Culture, n.d.). The *Maat* is a type of musical instrument made of clay in the form of a pot. Its face is covered with goat leather. Like the tabla, it is also played with a pair. On one hand, Phad narration is done in local people's dialect, hence it is easier for people to understand, while on the other hand, it is more interesting when carried out with musical instruments. In the rural areas of Rajasthan, there has been a tradition of getting the Bhopas to recite Phad even after the wishes have been fulfilled. In exchange of Phad reading, local residents donate money, clothes, cattle and food as gifts to them. Phad reading is the main source of income for Bhopa and Bhopis. In this way, reading Phad is also an employable work.

Innovations in Phad Painting

According to the changing circumstances, changes are also visible in the subjects of Phad painting. The idols of the common people and the incidents related to them have also started being depicted in it. For example, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Shiv Chalisa, Hanuman Chalisa, Durga Saptashati, Krishna Dashavatar Katha, Geet Govind, Lord Buddha, Lord Mahavir, Char Dham Yatra, Shri Chitragupta ji, the author of sin and virtue, public disrobing of Draupadi, abduction of Sita, Ram-Ravana war, Jagannath Puri, war of Rahu-Ketu with Surya, Kumar Sambhav etc. (Pandurang, 2024, p. H-8-57). Famous Phad painter Shri Kalyan Joshi ji (son of late Shri Lal Joshi ji) and his brother Shri Gopal Joshi ji have brought innovation in their Phad paintings and included contemporary subjects in it. He made many cartoons to create public awareness about social distancing during the Corona epidemic.

Under these innovations, emphasis has been laid on in-depth study of new texts and paintings based on them. Golden colors were not used in traditional Phad painting, but now golden colors are also being used in it.

Phad painting, traditionally done on canvas, is now also being done on the walls of important public places and offices. Bhilwara Railway Station presents a great example of this, where Phad paintings, which have become the identity of Bhilwara district, have been painted on the walls for the visiting passengers to see. Apart from all this, now Phad is also being molded into miniature painting.

The result of the innovative efforts of Phad painters was that now Phad paintings are no longer limited to a particular community but are being done on the basis of contemporary and adorable subjects of all castes. With rapid modernization, the work of Phad construction has started being done not only for Bhopa and Rebari communities but also for Brahmins, Vaishyas and other castes. In this way, with the creation of opportunities for reading Phad for the Bhopa community, apart from the villages, their income has also started increasing in the cities as well. Not only this, now apart from the temples and royal palaces, Phad is also being installed in the living rooms of people's homes, hotels and resorts etc.

Institutional Preservation of Phad Painting

Where on one hand Shri Lal Joshi ji spread the art of Phad painting to other people outside the family and on the other hand his son Shri Kalyan Joshi ji has taken the initiative to make it a means of self-employment for the youth. For this, he established an institute named 'Chitrashala' at Shaheed Chowk, Sanganeri Gate, District Bhilwara, in which hundreds of youngsters from local and other states come to take training in phad painting.

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This is a meaningful effort to keep Phad painting alive by refining the skills of young painters and giving it a precise direction.

Phad painting has also paved the way for tourism promotion in Bhilwara district. While on one hand the painters of the district go to the country and abroad to exhibit this art, on the other hand painters from other countries and states also come to Bhilwara for the purpose of learning it. In this series of learning and teaching, the Phad painters of the district have been registering their presence in the exhibitions organized in the country and abroad from time to time. Recently, Shri Kalyan Joshi ji has spread the colors of his art in Guatemala (Central America). Apart from this, Phad painters regularly exhibit their art in the handicraft fair organized every year at Jahangir Art Gallery (Mumbai), Jawahar Kala Kendra (Jaipur) and Gramin Haat organized in Bhilwara. To encourage handicrafts, awards are given by 'Shilpgram' established by Rajasthan Small Industries Corporation Limited (RAJSICO) and West Zone Cultural Centre, Udaipur, but a lot still needs to be done to preserve Phad painting.

Economic protection and upgradation of Phad painters

Since Phad painting has its origin from a certain geographical area, Shahpura, District Bhilwara, this art needs to be protected from unfair competition and at the same time, its artists need to be provided economic protection. By giving priority to this, efforts can be made by the State Government and GOI to issue 'Geographical Index or GI Tag' without any delay.

No special efforts have been made for the economic upliftment of Phad painters. In such a situation, the state government can provide loan at minimum interest rates to professional and beginner Phad painters for self-employment through this painting and insurance facility at minimum premium rates to provide protection from risk.

By establishing a special 'Export Promotion Park (EPP)' for Phad, marketing and distribution of Phad can be increased on the international platform and its painters can be provided financial support.

Government, administrative bodies and industrial institutions can make provisions for deserving awards, honors or gifts for Phad painters, especially child and youth painters.

Epilogue

Undoubtedly, Phad is a heritage painting not only of Bhilwara but also of Rajasthan. It has been a reflection of the rich cultural and religious tradition of the district. It is inspired by the investment of unwavering faith, devotion and dedication of its artists. The preparations done before painting, the fine work done during painting, the protection of the paintings made after painting from weather and creatures etc. all these tasks reflect the dedication, patience and hard work of the painters.

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