Painting: A Survey

Painting, *citra kalā* in Hindi and anciently called *varṇana*, evolved in India through a fusion of various cultures and traditions over centuries, if not millennia.

The earliest paintings in India are rock paintings of prehistoric times, found all over India, especially in places like the Paleolithic Bhimbetka rock shelters in Madhya Pradesh whose almost 10,000-year-old rock paintings display the concerns of early man — food, survival in a difficult environment and struggle in subduing animals. The colours used are mostly of mineral origin and have survived because the paintings were deep inside the caves or on inner walls. Bhimbetka was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2003.

Various scenes on a few of the rock shelters of Bhimbetka (courtesy: Wikimedia).

Bhimbetka drawings and paintings can be classified under different periods:

- **Upper Paleolithic**: in green and dark red, of huge figures of animals such as bison, tigers and rhinoceroses.
- **Mesolithic**: smaller figures, with linear decorations on the body of both animals and human figures and of hunting scenes and communal dancing.
- **Chalcolithic**: drawings of the hunting cave dwellers, exchanging goods with food-producing communities.
- **Early historic**: figures painted mainly in red, white and yellow of horse riders and of religious symbols, figures of *yakṣas* (supernatural beings), and sky chariots.
- **Medieval**: linear and more schematic paintings that show a certain degeneration and crudeness of style in colours prepared by combining manganese, hematite and wooden coal.

Classical Texts

Early literary compositions of India such as *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā* and Daṇḍin's *Daśakumārcarita* make many references to art galleries or *citraśālās*. The *śilpa śāstra* texts of art and architecture deal with the art of mural and miniature painting and also paintings executed on wood and cloth. The most comprehensive text is the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, which deals with the interdependence of dance, music and the visual arts. It is one of the eighteen Upapurāṇas. Chapters 35–43 describe the methods and ideals of painting, dealing not only with its religious aspect but also "proclaiming the joy that colours and forms and the representation of things seen and imagined produce."

Vātsyāyana, author of *Kāmasūtra*, a text dated to the 2nd century CE, enumerates the *ṣaḍaṅga* or "six limbs" of painting. The *ṣaḍaṅga* evolved into a series of canons that laid down the principles of painting. They are:

1. *rūpabheda,* the perception of difference in appearance;
2. *pramāṇa,* valid perception, measure and structure;
3. *bhāva,* feelings expressed in forms;
4. *lāvaṇya yojana,* infusion of grace in artistic representation;
5. *sādṛśya,* similarities;
6. *varṇikabhaṅga,* identification and analysis of colour and hue.

These "six limbs" were the basis of the Indian art of painting. Indian paintings can be broadly classified as murals and miniatures. Murals are large works executed on walls of solid structures. These may be cave walls, as in Ajanta (Maharashtra), or walls of temples, as in the Kailāsanātha temple of Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu).

Mural Painting

India's literature is replete with texts that describe palaces of the aristocratic class embellished with paintings, but the paintings of the caves of Ajanta are the most significant.

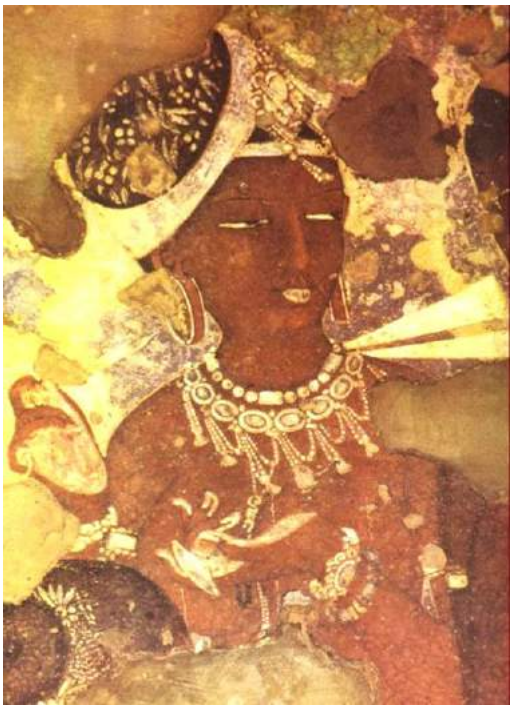
The story of Indian mural painting starts in the 2nd century BCE. There are several locations around India, the best known being Ajanta and Ellora in Maharashtra, Bagh in Madhya Pradesh and Panamalai and Sittanavāsal in Tamil Nadu, all of them either natural caves or rock-cut chambers. The paintings have both religious and other themes.

A rare 7th century Sittanavāsal painting in Tamil Nadu (courtesy: Wikipedia).

The Ajanta caves consist of 30 rock-cut Buddhist *caityas* and *vihāras* which date from the 2nd century BCE to the 7th century CE and include

paintings and sculptures described as "the finest surviving examples of Indian art, particularly painting", with depictions of the Buddha and the Jātaka tales. The Ajanta Caves are a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Like other ancient Buddhist monasteries, Ajanta was also a centre of learning. The layout of the caves with common exterior pathway shows this. Diṅnāga, the celebrated Buddhist logician and philosopher, lived here in the 5th century CE, according to Xuanzang (or Hsuan-tsang), a Chinese scholar who visited India in the 7th century.



Left: Depictions of Buddha in a cave at Ajanta (source: Wikimedia).
Right: An *apsara*, cave 17 (source: www.indian-heritage.org).

Caves of the First or Sātavāhana Period

Caves 9, 10, 12, 13 and 15A make up the earliest group of caves built between 100 BCE and 100 CE probably under the patronage of the Sātavāhana (230 BCE–220 CE) who ruled the region. Caves 9 and 10 are *caitya* halls with *stūpas*, while caves 12, 13, and 15A are *vihāras*.

Caves of the Second or Vākāṭaka Period

The second phase began in the 5th century and is often called the Mahāyāna phase. Caves of the second period are 1–8, 11, 14–29; some may be earlier caves extended or remodelled. Caves 19, 26, and 29 are *caitya* halls, while the rest are *vihāras,* many of them with a sanctum in the rear. In the caves of the second period the overwhelming majority of images represent the Buddha alone or scenes of his previous lives as well. Four of the later caves have large and relatively well-preserved mural paintings which "have come to represent Indian mural painting to the non-specialist".

The Ajanta murals were painted on a coat of plaster applied on the wall of the caves. The paintings were executed after the plaster dried up. The paintings survive to this day because the painting material holds together the pigment and the plaster. All the paintings were obviously the work of painters used to decorating palaces and temples, and indicate their familiarity with and interest in details of court life. But some paintings in Cave 1 depict Jātaka tales which show previous lives of the Buddha as a king.

The Ajanta Caves, once abandoned, were overwhelmed by the advancing jungle and were lost and forgotten, until their accidental rediscovery in 1819 by a British officer on a hunting party.

Bagh Caves

Similar to Ajanta's, beautiful frescoes were found at Bagh Caves, 150 km north of Ajanta. These paintings depict some aspects of Buddhist life and rituals besides scenes from ordinary life. One of the most famous paintings depicts a procession of elephants, while another depicts a dancer and women musicians. The influence of Ajanta is very apparent at Bagh.

Bagh Cave painting

Badami

Very little survives in the 6th-century Western Cālukyan cave temples, but the stamp of Ajanta remains unmistakeable.

Pallava

The Pallavas were great patrons of art. Mahendravarman I, who lived in the 7th century CE, was known as "*Citrakāra puli*", or "tiger among painters". The Talagiriśvara temple at Panamalai in the Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu is one of two shrines that bear testimony to Pallava painting. A small shrine to the north has a small section of a mural painting of an exquisite female figure, her leg bent, standing against a wall and with an umbrella above her. The Kailāsanātha temple at Kanchipuram contains nearly fifty cells around the inner courtyard, with traces of paintings in red, yellow, green, and black vegetable colours.

Pāṇḍya

Sittanavāsal in Pudukottai district is the location of a Jain monastery of the 7th century. Its walls and ceiling have been painted with mineral colours in the fresco-secco technique. The themes include a beautiful lotus pond and flowers, people

collecting lotuses from the pond, dancing figures, lilies, fish, geese, buffaloes and elephants. The ceiling of the *ardhamaṇḍapa* is decorated with murals and sculptures of Jaina *tīrthaṅkaras*. Originally, the entire cave temple, including the sculptures, was covered with plaster and painted on the theme of the Jaina *samavasaraṇa*, the "most attractive heavenly pavilion".

Cōḻa

Cōḻa frescoes were discovered within the circumambulatory corridor of Tanjavur's Bṛhadīśvara temple. The walls on either side of the narrow and dark passage of the inner *vimāna*, above the sanctum sanctorum, were painted between 1008 and 1012 CE. The paintings celebrate Lord Śiva. Each fresco, 4.5 metres tall and 3 metres wide, depicts Śiva: as Dakṣiṇāmūrti; being worshipped by the Tamil Shaivite saint Sundarar; as Tripurāntaka; and as Naṭarāja at the Chidambaram temple, worshipped by Rāja Rāja Cōḻa and his family.

Vijayanagara

There is a wealth of Vijayanagara paintings all over South India but the best examples are to be seen in the Vīrabhadra temple at Lepakshi, on the ceilings of the Virupākṣa temple at Hampi and Ranganathaswamy temple of Srirangam, and on the walls of the Varadarāja temple at Kanchipuram. While the subjects are primarily religious, we learn a lot from the paintings about the life and times of the Vijayanagara court.

A 15th century, painted ceiling of Virupākṣa temple, Hampi
(courtesy: Wikimedia commons).

Nāyaka Painting

After the fall of the Vijayanagara Empire in 1565, the Nāyakas ruled from the 16th to the 18th century and left behind a prolific collection of mural and wall paintings whose best example is the painted ceiling of the Thiruvarur temple in Tamil Nadu, depicting the story of Mucukunda, a legendary Cōḻa king.

Miniature Painting

Miniature paintings are executed on books and albums, and on perishable material such as paper and cloth. The Pālas of Bengal were the pioneers of miniature painting in India. The art reached its zenith during the Mughal period and was pursued by the painters of different Rajasthani Schools of painting, like Bundi, Kishangarh, Jaipur, Marwar and Mewar. The Rāgamāla paintings also belong to this school, as do the Company paintings produced during the British Raj.

Top: Manuscript page including a painting of Maitreya Bodhisattva on his throne. Sanskrit *Aṣṭasāhasrika Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra,* manuscript written in the Ranjana script in India, in early 12th century (source: Wikimedia). *Bottom*: Manuscripts with miniatures (courtesy: Michel Danino & Guwahati State Museum).

Unfortunately, early miniatures in wood and cloth have been completely lost. The earliest extant, belonging to the late 8th or mid 9th century of the Pāla period in eastern India, are representations of Buddhist *yantras*, graphic symbols which were visual aids to the *mantras* and the *dhāraṇīs* (types of ritual speech). Conforming to the canons of iconography, these Buddhist miniatures portray Buddhist deities such as Prajñāpāramitā, who, as the mother of all the Buddhas, was the personification of esoteric knowledge. The Buddhist paintings were drawn in red and white, forming colour planes. The inspiration came from the metal images, giving an illusion of

relief. Miniatures were painted according to the rules of mural painting, the rule of proportions being regulated by strict codes of measurement. Effects such as foreshortening were derived from the study of sculpture rather than from reality.

The earliest extant miniatures are found in the manuscript *Aṣṭasāhasrika Prajñāpāramitā*, dated to the rule of Mahipāla (from c. 988). This style disappeared from India by the late 12th century. Miniature painting developed in western India in the 10th century in the state of Gujarat. These paintings are seen in mini-books of the Vaiṣṇavas and Jains. Subsequent Jain miniatures moved away from flat, two-dimensional compositions: images became animated and all conventional representations of perspective were no longer in vogue. The human figure was represented in the simplest and most visible manner. Against a background of rich colour, stood out thick, boldly drawn figures. The paintings were harmonized with the enclosing script. The ornamentation was increased to result in heavy stylization. The Jain painters preferred three-quarter profiles, displacing one of the eyes to avoid foreshortening, while frontal images had eyes set near the bridge of the nose.

The Jain paintings gave rise to the Gujarat School, from where it spread further to Rajasthan and Malwa. This evolved into Rajput painting and the subsequent fusion of the Indian and Persian styles in Mughal art.

Mughal Paintings

The Mughal School of miniature painting reached its zenith under Akbar and Jehangir. The *Ain-i-Akbari* shows the importance the art had attained during this period. Basically Persian in style, the subjects depicted were scenes of warfare, hunting and trials of strength. The Mughal School saw an amalgamation of many influences: landscape details of Far Eastern art; clouds out of Chinese paintings; mountains and water of Central Asian art. In Akbar's period, there was a greater attempt to portray reality as well as distance and horizontal perspective. Both Akbar

and Jehangir encouraged the illustration of epics and histories, *Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Akbarnāma* and *Hamzanāma*.

The finale of the Mughal School is seen in the Deccan style, which differs by its preference for rigid, stylized and decorative forms, more Indian than Persian. The Mughal School saw a return to naturalism and a total lack of interest in three-dimensionality and volume. In its two-dimensionality, objects were often seen from two different points of view. Characters, animals and buildings were seen normally, while carpets, roofs, rivers and other details were seen from above. Besides the Chinese and Central Asian influences, European influences came in with the Italians to the Mughal court. The European element in Mughal painting brought a fusion between Indian and European styles.

Left: Abul Fazl presenting *Akbarnāma* to Akbar. *Right*: The spy Zambur leads Mahiya into the city of Tawariq, folio from *Hamzanāma,* c. 1570 (courtesy: Wikipedia).

Rajput School and the Kṛṣṇa Cult

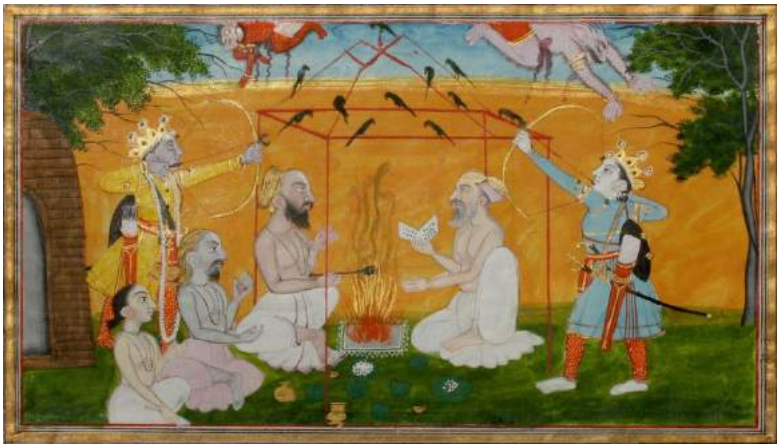
The Rajput School of miniature painting was spontaneous and vital in opposition to the heraldic court style of the Mughal School. Rajput paintings depicted festivals, mythological subjects and the important episodes from the life of Lord Kṛṣṇa. This coincided with the spread of the Kṛṣṇa cult as a part of the Bhakti movement in medieval northern India. Derived from the Gujarat School of painting, Rajput miniatures are based on drawings with bright splashes of colour.

This school is divided into two main branches: Rajasthani and Pahāṛi. Among the Rajasthani Schools, Mewar stood out with its portrayal of Kṛṣṇa legend characterised by a naiveté and freshness, recalling the rural origins of the artists, and are singularly appropriate for the pastoral scenes of the *Kṛṣṇa līlā* which they portray. Related schools of Bikaner and others generated the Amber School. Other important schools include Bundelkhand, Marwar and Bundi. The last is notable for its brilliant colouring, and almost an impressionist style. Finally, the Bihar School, coming at the end of the Rajasthani movement, produced interesting paintings with Mughal influence in their wealth of details and heraldic character and yet possessing the freshness of the Rajasthani miniatures.

An 18th-century Rajput painting by the artist Nihāl Chand (courtesy: Wikipedia).

The Pahāṛi School

The important centres of the Pahāṛi School were at Basholi, Jammu, Guler and Kangra. The Pahāṛi School was lively and romantic, technically superior with soft tonal shading, exquisitely created backgrounds that merged with the theme, and attitudes and postures highly evocative of the moods they were to convey. The Kangra paintings are as romantic as Kālidāsa's descriptions of the mountains. In the Kangra School, Indian miniature paintings reached the zenith in the depiction of the Kṛṣṇa and Śiva legends. The colours were extracted from minerals, plant sources, conch shells, and even by processing precious stones; gold and silver were also used. The preparation of desired colours is a lengthy process, sometimes taking weeks.



Left: Folio from a *Rāmāyaṇa* manuscript: Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa defend sage Viśvamitra from demons, Basohli, early 19th century. *Right:* Kṛṣṇa lifting the Govardhana mountain, illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Tira-Sujanpur, early 18th century.

Tanjore and Mysore Painting

The artists of Vijayanagara turned up in two great courts of late medieval India and created a new genre of painting, inspired by the great Vijayanagara traditions. Tanjore paintings are of popular Hindu deities and scenes from Hindu epics.

Mysore painting is another important legacy of classical Vijayanagara painting. The themes for most of these paintings are also Hindu deities and epic stories. With the help of a thin brush, all the jewellery and architectural features are painted over chalk paste, to give a slightly raised effect of carving, and then allowed to dry. A thin gold foil is pasted on this. The rest of the drawing is then painted using water colours.

Left: Mysore Painting of goddess Sarasvatī (courtesy: Wikimedia). *Right:* Kṛṣṇa in Tanjore painting (source: www.sandhyamanne.com).

Folk painting

There are many schools of Indian folk painting, a few of which are mentioned here.

Padma Shri Mahasundari Devi working at a Madhubani painting (source: www.vidushini.blogspot.in).

Madhubani

Madhubani painting is practised in the Mithila region of Bihar. Themes revolve around Hindu deities and epic tales, especially tales of Lord Kṛṣṇa, and scenes of social events like weddings. No space is left empty: gaps are filled in with paintings of flowers, animals, birds and geometric designs. Artists use natural dyes and pigment extracted from leaves, herbs and flowers.

Paṭṭacitra

Paṭṭacitra (meaning "cloth painting") is a folk style of Odisha closely linked with the worship of Lord Jagannath of Puri. While there is evidence of painting in the Khaṇḍagiri and Udayagiri caves, the earliest indigenous paintings from Odisha are the Paṭṭacitra done by the Chitrakars (a community of

Pattachitra painting depicting Ganeśa and Śiva (courtesy: Wikipedia).

painters). The themes, centred around the Vaiṣṇava cult, Lord Jagannath and Lord Kṛṣṇa, are the major sources of inspiration. The painters still use vegetable and mineral colours and prepare their own paints. The old tradition of Oriya painting survives among the artists or Chitrakars of Puri, Raghurajpur, Paralekhamundi and Sonepur.

Kalamkāri

Kalamkāri or "pen craft" of Srikalahasti, is executed with a *kalam* or pen, used for free hand drawing of the subject and filling in the colours, entirely by hand. Paintings are usually hand-painted or block-printed on cotton textile. This style grew around temples and had a distinctly religious identity — scrolls, temple hangings, deities and scenes from the great Hindu epics. The Machilipatnam style tends to have more block printing. However, both use only vegetable colours.

A kalamkāri depiction of Arjuna's quest for enlightenment (source: www.exoticindia.com).

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There are several schools of tribal painting such as the Warli, Gond, Bhil and Kurumba, among others.

Painting like most Indian art reflects the religious passion of the people, their joys and aspirations. It is also a documentation of the life and times, of kings and courts, nature, plants and animals. It is a celebration of colour, of festivals and all that is beautiful. India's heritage of painting is a record of happy times and happy people who expressed their hopes and faith through their works of art.


Left: Gond art (source: www.crazygallery.info). *Right*: Warli art (courtesy: Uma Sharma).

Comprehension

1. Where do we find evidence of the earliest rock paintings in India?
2. What are the changes in the colour used in paintings from the earlier paintings to the medieval period?
3. Name the different subjects that *Viśnudharmottara Purāṇa* deals with.
4. What are the main principles of painting?
5. What are the Ajanta murals called? How did they survive to this date? Mention the process.
6. Describe the themes painted in the Ajanta caves. Who do think must have painted them?
7. Establish a connection between the Ajanta paintings of those in the Bagh Caves.
8. Comment on the colour scheme used by the Pallava dynasty artists.
9. Make a comparative study of the themes and colours used by the painters of the Pāṇḍyas and Cōḻa dynasties.

10. What do you understand by miniature painting? Where did it start in India? Name various schools of this art.
11. Mention the characteristic features of Jain paintings.
12. Describe the Persian style of painting and compare it with other schools.

Activities

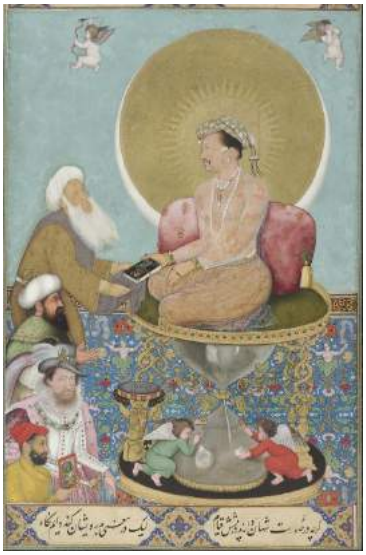
- Design a card for various occasions using folk or tribal art. You could use Madhubani, Warli, Gond, Paṭṭacitra and Kalamkāri or any other such art form to depict the richness of this tradition.
- Study various painting styles of India to find out if there are any rituals and traditions followed before starting any painting. You may look up Phad and Nathdwara painting for reference.
- Debate on the topic "Techno-savvy man today has replaced the artist".
- Select and observe a painting of your choice and develop your own story out of it. You may:
  - place yourself in the painting and write appropriate dialogues;
  - let your imagination go beyond the painting;
  - focus on the theme and enrich / enhance it with sound sequences.

Projects

- Work in groups and make a process document of a painting tradition. Use the following hints:
  - Name of the style of painting
  - Region
  - History behind the tradition
  - Patronage when the tradition flourished
  - Base

- Colours
- Popular themes
- Changes over the centuries
- How has the painting tradition adapted to the needs of the market today.

➢ 'Akbar and Jehangir encouraged the illustrations of epics and histories.' Make a project exploring the style of miniature painting in their time, the use of form, colour, motifs and nature. Mention the oriental and European influences.

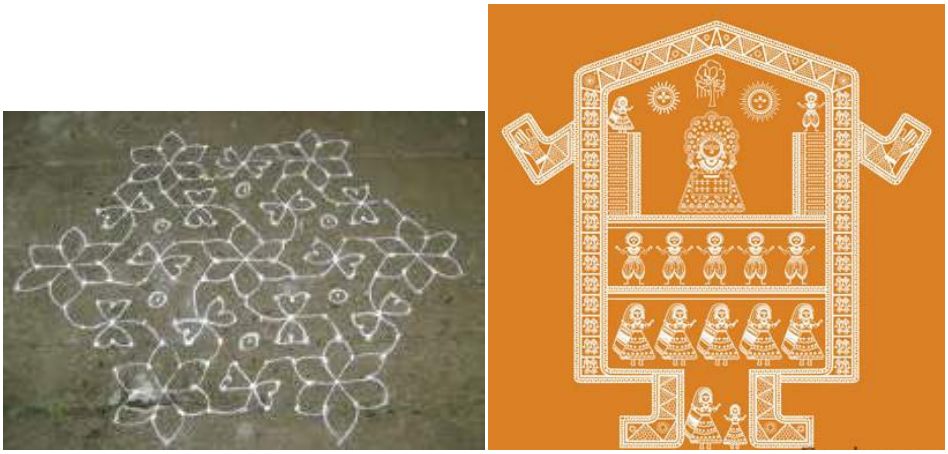



Left: Jehangīr. *Right*: *Akbarnāma* (courtesy: Wikipedia).

➢ Coinciding with Bhakti movement, the Kṛṣṇa cult of miniature painting flourished in Rajasthan and Pahāṛi styles. Study and research further the portrayal of the Kṛṣṇa legend which brought freshness to this miniature style of paintings.


Left: Rādhā celebrating *holi*, Pahāṛi School of miniature.
Right: Kṛṣṇa, Mewari School of miniature. (Courtesy: Wikipedia)

- Write an article for a newspaper / magazine on a case study of traditional painters / artists. Examine and take note of the changing trends. In what ways have they impacted the individual artist, his works and society?
- *Rangoli, mandana* and *alpana* (floor and wall decorations) are practised by women in most parts of India even today. Collect patterns of several regions mentioning the rituals, occasions and the materials used for the art.



Left: *Rangoli*. *Right*: *Mandana* painting (for the festival of *ahoi aṣṭamī*).

Extended Activity

- Create an awareness campaign under the auspices of your school's eco-club about the substitute eco-friendly colours that can be used in paintings, *rangolis* etc. Then conduct a competition between groups promoting the use of natural colours on different occasions.

Further Reading

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- Miniature painting www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/383990/miniature-painting
- Different forms of Indian paintings, like cave painting, Miniature, Mughal, Mysore, Pahāṛi etc. www.culturalindia.net/indian-art/paintings/index.html
- Different forms of paintings. www.myindianculture.com/2011/12/indian-folk-art-tribal-art-paintings.html
- History of Indian paintings www.itasveer.com/artsmart/articles/analysis-of-indian-paintings/history-of-indian-paintings
- Analysis of Indian paintings www.itasveer.com/artsmart/articles/gallery/analysis-of-indian-paintings
- Wall paintings of India http://ccrtindia.gov.in/wall%20paintings.html
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- Mysore painting http://wiki.indianfolklore.org/images/d/d3/Mysore.pdf
- Ajanta caves paintings www.indian-heritage.org/painting/ajanta/ajanta.html#links

Painting:
Excerpts from Primary Texts

Eulogizing the art of painting for its functions and extraordinary qualities

He who paints waves, flames, smoke and streamers fluttering in the air, according to the movement of the wind, should be considered a great painter.

Painting is the best of all arts, conducive to *dharma*, pleasure, health, and emancipation. It gives the greatest pleasure, when placed in a house.

Painting is the best of all arts, conducive to *dharma*, and emancipation. It is very auspicious when placed in a house. As Sumeru is the best of mountains, Garuda, the chief of birds, and a lord of the earth, the most exalted amongst men, so is painting the best of all arts. (*The Vishṇudharmottara,* tr. Stella Kramrisch, III.43)

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Preparation of the principal colours

(Oh) king, I shall now speak to you about the preparation of the principal colours. (Oh) best of kings, there are five principal colours, viz., white (*śveta*), red (*rakta*), yellow (*pīta*), black (*kṛṣṇa*) and green (*harit*). It would be impossible to enumerate the mixed colours in this world (which are produced by) the mixture of two or three (primary colours) and through invention of various states or conditions (i.e., shades or tones). (Oh) best of kings, now I shall speak to you about the division of dark (*śyāma*) and white (*gaura*), which is due to the great suitability for getting mixed, of different colours of this world, from which the two-fold colour of all is explained (i.e., the light and dark shade of every colour).

Among these (colours), the white (i.e., the light shade) should be of five kinds and the dark of twelve kinds. Bright (gold), light (white), tooth-white, pure-sandal white, autumn-cloud-white and autumn-moon-white — these five traditionally are called the five-fold white (light shade).

(The varieties of *śyāma*) should be: reddish-dark, *mudga* (brownish) dark, *dūrvā* sprout (greenish) dark and grayish dark too, (oh) king, tawny dark and topaz dark, *priyangu*-creeper dark and monkey dark. Then come blue-lotus (*nīlōtpala*) dark and blue as the *nīlakaṇṭha* bird and purple-lotus (*raktotpala*) dark and cloud-dark. Their application is said to be in accordance with the colours of (the respective) objects and they gain in beauty by intermixture of colours. (*The Vishṇudharmottara,* III.27, verses 7-26.)

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Process of preparation of colours for base plaster

Brick powder of three kinds has to be mixed with clay, one third part (in amount of the brick powder), having mixed saffron with oil, (one) should mix (lit. place) (with it) gum resin, bees' wax, liquorice, molasses and *mudga* (*phaseolus munga*) preparation in equal parts. One-third part of burnt yellow-myrobalan should be added therein. Finally the astringent made of the Bel-tree (*Feronia elephantum*) destructive (of all injurious agents) mixed in proportion of two to one should be added by an intelligent artist and also a portion of sand, proportionate to the amount of the whole. Then the artist should drench (this mixture) with moist split pulse dissolved in water. The whole of this moist preparation has to be kept in a safe place for one month only. (After) the moisture has evaporated within a month, a skilful (artist) should put (this) dried (yet still damp) plaster on the wall, having carefully considered (everything). It should be plain, even, well distributed, without ridges or holes, neither too thick nor too thin. Should it (look) ill done after having become (quite) dry (due to shrinkage), then it ought to be carefully smoothed by coatings of

plaster (made) of that clay (as mentioned before) mixed with resin of the Śāla-tree (*Shorea robusta*) and with oil. (It is further made) smooth by (repeated) anointing, constant sprinkling with water and by careful polish. (Oh) lord, when this wall has promptly dried, it does not go to ruins anywhere even at the end of a hundred years. (*The Vishṇudharmottara,* III.40, verses 1-30.)

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Order followed by the painter before he starts painting

By this means various jewelled floors can be made of variegated mixture in twofold colours. In painting with care on a wall, dry, brilliant and smooth, an artist devoted to the master, should begin his work on an auspicious day, with his face, towards east, thinking of God, having worshipped and bowed down to Brahmins and preceptors who know this (i.e., painting) well, uttering Svasti (Success!), clad in a white garment and restrained in his soul. Then the learned artist should draw (outlines) with unoozing black and white brushes in due order and fix them on the duly measured ground. These then should be filled with colours in appropriate places. (*The Vishṇudharmottara,* III.40, verses 1-30.)

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Preparation of base colours and qualities of a good painting

Primary colours are said to be five — white, yellow, the colour of the myrobalan, black and blue. (Oh) best of kings, intermediate (colours) are traditionally said to be hundred-fold. (But an artist) should mix (lit. divide) the primary (lit. full) colours according to his own logic and imagination and make thousand fold (what is hundred fold). If the blues are transformed a great deal, green colour is produced. It is either pure, with an admixture of white or blue-predominating. One or more (of these shades) are (used) as it is suitable to the (special) painting. Blue, (too,) is of three kinds: with white predominating, with very little white or with both

in equal parts. Thus it is variously transformed by being connected with anything applied as an astringent.

Thus beautiful (lit. auspicious) paintings should be made yellowish like the *dūrvā* sprouts, green like the wood apple and dark like the kidney-bean. Blue tinged with yellowish-white (becomes) changed in colour and of various kinds according as either of the two (constituents) is (present) in greater or smaller degree or in equal parts. For that reason the blue-lotus-colour (*nīlotpalanibha*) appears beautiful when partly shaded dark like the *māsa*. By proper selection and distribution of colours paintings become delightful. A painting in red and dark like the red lotus (*raktotpāla*) becomes beautiful when combined with white lac, covered by a coating of lac and resin. The latter also transforms various other colours.

(Oh) king, colouring articles are gold, silver, copper, mica, deep coloured brass, red lead, tin, yellow orpiment, yellow myrobalam, lac, vermillion and indigo, oh best of men. There are many other similar colouring substances, oh great king, in every country; they should be prepared with an astringent. A fluid should be made of iron leaves. A mica defile placed in iron should serve as a distiller. In this way iron becomes suitable for painting. In the (work called) *surasendrabhūmija* a decoction of hides was said to be a distiller of mica. ... In the case of all colours, the exudation of the *Sindūra* tree is desirable. A painting, firmly drawn with a magnificent hairy brush (lit. tail) on a canvas dipped in the juice of the best *dūrvā* grass cannot be (destroyed and remains (intact) for many years though washed by water. (*The Vishṇudharmottara,* III.40, verses 1-30.)

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Four kinds of paintings

Mārkaṇḍeya said: Painting is said to be of four kinds — (1) "true to life" (*satya*), (2) "of the lute player" (*vaiṇika*), (3) "of the city" or "of common man" (*nāgara*) and (4) "mixed" (*miśra*). I am going to speak about their characteristics (now). Whatever painting bears a resemblance to this

earth, with proper proportion, tall in height, with a nice body, round and beautiful is called "true to life." That is called *vaiṇika* which is rich in the display of postures, maintaining strict proportions, placed in an exactly square field, not phlegmatic, not (very) long and well finished. That painting should be known as *nāgara*, which is round, with firm and well developed limbs with scanty garlands and ornaments. (Oh) best of men, the *miśra* derives its name from being composed (of the three categories). (*The Vishṇudharmottara,* III.41, verses 1-15.)

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Representation of various themes

Now I am going to speak about the appearance of things actually seen. A learned (artist) should show the sky without any special colour and full of birds, (oh) king. Similarly (the artist) should show the firmament adorned by stars and the earth with its vegetation in all its variety (lit. with all its distinctive attributes). (Oh) best of kings, (an artist) should show a mountain by a cluster of rocks, peaks, (with) metal (-vein) trees, waterfalls and snakes. A learned (artist) should show a forest by various sorts of trees, birds and beasts. (He should show) water by innumerable fishes and tortoises, by lotuses and other aquatic animals and plants. A learned (artist) should show a city by beautiful temples, palaces, shops, houses and lovely royal roads. An artist should show a village by its boundaries containing sparingly gardens. Fortresses should be shown with battlements, ramparts, high mounts and entrances in their enclosures. Markets should be shown; containing articles of merchandise; drinking places should be represented full of men engaged in drinking, and those engaged in gambling should be drawn devoid of upper garments, — the winners merry and the losers full of grief. The battlefield has to be shown as containing four divisions of the army (i.e., elephant corps, cavalry, chariot corps and infantry), with soldiers engaged in fighting, strewn with corpses and besmeared with blood. The burning ground should be represented with funeral piles and dead bodies. (A painter) should

represent a road, with caravans consisting of camels and other (animals) carrying burdens. The night should be shown — with moon, planets and stars, with approaching thieves and men (fast) asleep and others engaged in worldly pleasures (lit. showing what is of the world). In the first part of the night women are to be shown going out to meet their lovers. The (breaking of the) dawn is to be shown) by the rising sun, the lamps (looking) dim and crowing cocks, or a man should be drawn as if ready for work. The evening is to be shown by its red glow and by Brahmins engaged in controlling their senses. The (setting in) of darkness has to be shown by men approaching their abodes. That the moon is shining should be shown by the *kumuda* flower in full bloom, while the many petals of the lotus flower should be closed. When, depicting a shower of rain, (that it is) raining should be shown by a man well covered. That the sun is shining should be shown by (drawing) creatures suffering from heat. (An artist) should represent spring with merry men and women, by "laughing" vernal trees, with bees swarming about and cuckoos.

The summer has to be shown with dried pools, with languid men, with deer seeking the shade of trees, and buffaloes burying themselves in mud. An artist should show the rainy season by flashes of lightning, beautified by rainbows, accompanied by heavily laden clouds, birds perched on trees, and lions and tigers sheltered in caves. A painter should paint the autumn with trees heavy with fruits, the earth (covered) with ripe corn (-fields) and with tanks beautified by lotuses and swans. The "dewy" season (*hemanta*, the approach of winter), a learned artist should show by frost on the horizon, with the earth lopped (of her crops) and the ground covered by dew-drops. A learned (painter) should paint the winter with the horizon-shrouded in hoar-frost, with shivering men and delighted crows and elephants.

(Oh) lord of men, seasons should be represented by trees in flowers and fruits and creatures delighted (or otherwise) and looking at nature. Sentiments and expressions should be represented as already spoken of. (An artist) should also suitably employ herein what was said about

dancing. A painting in which an object is devoid of shading (*varttanā*) is called 'mediocre' (*madhyama*).A picture which in some parts is shaded and in others remains without shading is 'bad' (*adhama*). A picture shaded all over is good (*uttama*). A painting, in which everything is drawn in an acceptable (form) in its proper position, in its proper time and age, becomes excellent, while in the opposite case it becomes (quite) different. A painting drawn with care, pleasing to the eye, thought out with supreme intelligence and remarkable by its execution, beauty, charm (lit. amorous pastime), taste, and such other qualities, yields the desired pleasure. (III.42, verses 1-84.)

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Nature of the Art of Painting

Weakness or thickness of delineation, want of articulation, improper juxtaposition of colours are said to be defects of painting. (Proper position, proportion and spacing, gracefulness and articulation, resemblance, decrease and increase i.e., foreshortening) these are known as the eight (good) qualities of painting. Painting which has not (the proper) position, devoid of (the appropriate) *rasa*, empty to look at, hazy with darkness and devoid of life-movement (*chetanā*) — is said to be inexpressive. One that seems as if dancing by its posture or appears to look frightened, laughing or graceful, thereby appears as if endowed with life, as if breathing. These pictures are (considered) of an auspicious type. (A painter) should make his (painting) to be without darkness and emptiness. No (painting depicting a) figure with defective limbs, covered all over with hair, overwhelmed with fear due to internal disease, or smeared with a yellow pigment (ought to be executed) . An intelligent artist paints what looks probable (lit. what commands trust), but never what transcends it. (Oh) lord of men, a painting (by) the skilled, the righteous and those (who are) versed in the Śāstras brings on prosperity and removes adversity very soon. A painting cleanses and curbs anxiety, augments future good, causes unequalled and pure delight, kills the evils

of bad dreams and pleases the household deity. The place where a picture is firmly placed does not look empty (*The Vishṇudharmottara,* III.43, verses 1–39).

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Eight Limbs of Painting

Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra, an 11th-century treatise on architecture prescribes 'Eight Limbs of Painting': *bhūmibandhanam* (preparation of surface), *vartika* (crayon work), *rekhā-karmāṇi* (outline work), *lakṣaṇam* (features of face), *varna-karma* (colouring), *vartanākramaḥ* (relief by shading), *lekha-karaṇaṁ* (correction) and *dvicakarma* (final outline).

vartika prathamaṁ teśā
dritīyaṁ bhūmibandhanam
lekhyaṁ tṛtīyaṁ syād rekhā-
karmāṇi vartalemiha lakṣaṇam
pañcamaṁ karṣakarmacca
ṣaṣṭham syād vartanākramaḥ
saptamaṁ lekhanaṁ lekha-
karaṇaṁ dvicakarma tathāṣṭaman

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Comprehension

1. According to the given text, who is considered as an accomplished painter?
2. Write briefly about the ceremonial start of a painting.
3. Read the process given in the text on preparation of base plaster, research and compare it with the contemporary methods, also list examples. Look at the two paintings below and discuss the various stages of a painting.


Left: Orchha (M.P.). *Right*: Ajanta cave painting.

4. What are the qualities of a good painting?
5. List the eight limbs of painting and describe their relevance to present-day painting.