



The Study of the History and the Characteristic of the Glorious Wall Paintings of Bundi Chitrasala

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Abstract

The civilization of India is one of the most important events in the history of mankind. Wall paintings were a normal feature of ancient India. An unbroken stream of references to wall paintings is evidenced in the literary texts. Bundi is a town of Rajasthan, an Indian state, which is famous for its forts and fresco. There is a rich treasure trove of wall paintings of magnificent palace complexes of Bundi in Rajasthan. The chitrasala of Bundi fort is fully decorated with beautiful wall paintings. It has a variety of themes, both religious and secular. The walls also show a much wider range of subjects than is to be found in the miniatures. The traditional subjects were related to Ramayana, Krishna – leela, Shiv-Parvati and the lord Bramha, but the most striking impression is conveyed by more than thirty-six panels devoted to the paintings of Nayikas. The Chitrasala not only presents an astonishing world of people engaged in various amusements, religious beliefs, social customs etc. but it also presents a great tradition of Bundi style of painting.

Keywords: *Chitrasala, treasure, wall paintings, Nayikas, Ramayana, miniatures*

1. Introduction

India is unique in its art traditions. No country in the world has until now preserved its age-old traditions as vigorously and steadily as India has done. "Giving, taking, borrowing, assimilating, crating India has come to be what she is, perhaps the most fascinating country in the world" (Sen, 1948). For untold centuries the aspirations and ideas of the people expressed through religion, art, music, literature, manners and peculiar structure of their society have remained vital (Saksena, 1979).

Paintings in ancient India were integrated with the social life of mankind. It revealed a cultivated taste and was a flaunt of man's personal achievement. Wall paintings were a normal feature of ancient India. Varied interesting information on wall paintings is available in Puranas. The Chitrasutra (chapter no. 35 to 46 of Vishnudhramottara Purana) of the Vishnudhramottara Purana (a hindu text, encyclopedic in nature) offers an encyclopedic knowledge on paintings including the wall painting. The other similar texts are: the Chitralakshana (a Sanskrit manuscript, divided in three chapters) by Nagnajit, Bhoja's Samarangana-Sutradhara (an encyclopedic work on classical Indian architecture), Somesvara's Mansollasa (a Sanskrit text, as this is an important source of socio-cultural information on 11th & 12th century India), Sri Kumara's Silparatna (a classical text on traditional South Indian representational performing arts), Chapters in the Narada-Silpa (a Sanskrit text on architectural civil engineering), etc. (Agarwal, 1977). Vatsyana's Kamasutra (an ancient Indian Sanskrit text) and Yasodhara's Jayamangala (the commentary written by Yashodhara pandit, based on kamasutra), as it also makes interesting references to wall paintings.

An unbroken stream of references to the wall painting is evidenced in literary texts. Taking a complete picture of the various centers, chiefly in the western and Southern India, a connected history of its development can be worked out. However, with the fall of the Rajput empires in the North, no single instance has been discovered from the Sultanate period, except in certain pieces of Rajasthan. Revival of this tradition can be traced from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in that region (Agarwal, 1977).

2. Objectives

The objectives of the present study are as follow:

1. To study the historical development and characteristics of the wall paintings in Chitrasala of Bundi Fort
2. To study the subject matter and themes painted in wall paintings



3. To attract the focus of art lovers and general public towards the protection and worth of these paintings

3. Materials and Methods

In this research paper the traditional doctrinal research methodology has been adopted. The research work has been based on the study of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are in the form of historical documents, literary texts, etc. Secondary sources are available in the form of books, journals, periodicals, magazines, research articles and photographs of the wall paintings, visual observation and visual analysis of wall paintings is also done on the basis of the elements of art. The analysis and interpretation of all the material will be done to find out the condition of the paintings in the present scenario.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 History of Bundi

Bundi is a town in the Hadoti region of Rajasthan state in the Northwest India. It is one of the particular architectural notes for its ornate forts, palaces and stepwell reservoirs known as Barois. It is the administrative headquarters of Bundi District. Bundi has many temples, so it is called 'Chhoti Kashi' (Little Varanasi). In ancient times, the area around Bundi was apparently inhabited by various local tribes. Bundi and the eponymous princely state are said to derive their names from a former meena tribe man (Sardar/King) called Bunda Meena. Bundi was previously called 'Bunda-Ka-Nal', Nal meaning 'narrow ways'. Later the region was governed by Rai Deva Hada, who took over Bundi from Jaita Meena in 1342, and established a princely state Bundi, renaming the surroundings area called Hadoti, the land of great Hada Rajputs. Bundi came under the Sisodia Rajputs of Mewar and the Hada rulers were their vassals until 1568, when Rai Surjan Singh submitted to Akbar after the fall of Ranthambore.

4.2 Bundi School / Kalam

This school developed in the region of Kota, Bundi and Jhalawar in the beginning of the 17th Century. It was an independent branch of Mewar school. After some time, the Mughal effect in it was totally removed and it came up as an independent school different from Mewar. This school reached its climax by the middle of the 18th Century (Sharma, 1980). Again some Mughal effect is visible in the paintings and they look more novel, as well. Bundi preserves a set of wall paintings which includes undoubtedly some of the most beautiful of mural art.

4.3 The Bundi Fort

We know for a fact that the Bundi Fort existed during Akbar's period. It was, however, built much earlier than that but had fallen into disuse as a result of constant invasions. The present structure was largely built by Rao Rattan Singh in the 17th Century and later on added to by Rao Chatra Sal (1631-58) and Umed Singh I (1748-70) (Seth, 2003).

4.4 Chitrasala of Bundi

One of the finest treasures of wall paintings is the Chitrasala of Bundi. It is the most attractive place among many wonders of this place such as forts, hunting resorts, artistic and architecturally excellent stepwells, temples, chhataries, tanks and lakes. The Chitrasala (a fully painted open porch which is called chitrasala in local language) has no parallel in the whole galaxy of architectural marvels of Rajasthan. Col. James Tod, the famous historian who visited the palaces in 1820's has rightly said the following:

Through Rajwaras, which boast many fine palaces, 'Boondi-Ka-Mahal' is allowed to possess the first rank, for which it is indebted to situation no less than to the splendid additions which it has continually received, for it is an aggregate of palaces, each having the name of its founder, and the character of the architecture is so uniform, that it breaks all fantasies appear only to rise from the



peculiarity of the position, and serve to diversify its beauty. The 'Chatra-Mahal', that is built by Raja Chatra Sal, is the most extensive and most modern addition" (Kaur, 1998).

It is an open verandah covered on all three sides and opening into a beautiful garden. It is reputed to have been built by Umed Singh I and is one of those rare structures in Rajasthan which seems to have been constructed for the specific purpose of displaying the excellence of the art of wall paintings.

4.5 Subjects

The Chitrasala has a variety of themes, both religious and secular, painted on its walls. But the most striking impression is conveyed by more than thirty-six panels devoted to the paintings of Nayikas. Here a woman is painted at her most beautiful expression, in the full glory of her youth. Most of the Nayikas belong to their late teens. They invariably stand proud, displaying the charm of their 'navayauvan' (early youth) with an elegance of taste and a longing for love which attracts one of these women. A number of panels show them standing alone, looking as though unable to support the burden of their beauty, all 'utka nayikas', yearning for love. Some of them are half-nude, rinsing out their freshly washed hair or just 'alas Kanyas' (relaxing maids) taking 'angarai' (stretching themselves). The abhisarika nayika is going out of the forest to find her lover and her foot is pricked by a thorn. The vassaksajja nayika is also shown waiting for her lover seated on a bed. Some of them are seen reclining against bolsters smoking hookahs, some look at their own beauty in the mirror and are spellbound; yet others are doing sringara (adornment). Some just relax on terraces and watch the flight of pigeons, the eternal bringers of messages of lovers (Seth, 2003). A beautiful composition depicts a nayika waiting in a garden pavilion with her friends and attendants for her lover.

The rest of the panels are dedicated to the illustration of religious themes. The artists have lavished their most tender care and devotion to painting panels from Krishna-Leela which are among the most beautiful paintings found here. The main episodes of Krishna's life depicted here are Krishna as a child-god, lover and mystic. In the verandah, one enters to find three big square panels depicting three well-known pursuits of Krishna-Maharasa, where he dances with gopis in a circle, peacock, monkey and pigeon are depicted in the background. All these help to create a lively atmosphere. Krishna lifting the mount Govardhan is the subject of the second panel, Krishna is playing his flute which creates a hypnotic effect on the gopis standing nearby. The third panel in this series, is of 'chir-haran' (stealing of clothes) of Gopi's bathing in the Yamuna by Krishna who sits on a huge Kadamba tree (Kaur, 1998).

The artists were well-versed in the Ramayana and its stories. There is an illustration of Rama Durbar after Rama's coronation. Rama is shown seated on the throne with Sita while his brothers and Hanumana are paying homage to him. One of the biggest panels painted here illustrates the theme of Rama's wedding with Sita.

Vishnu's wife Lakshmi is shown as 'Gaj Lakshmi', seated on a lotus just above the water with elephants from that lake, where the elephants are showering Lakshmi with water and flowers, through their trunk.

To complete the homage to the trinity, Shiva and Brahma have also been illustrated. In the beginning of the Chitrasala, Shiva and Parvati are shown sitting on Shiva's Vahana (Vehicle), Nandi, struggling with Irravat, the elephant. Shiva, Parvati, Ganesha, Nandi and the tiger vahana of Devi, are also shown seated outside a small hut beside a mountain. Ganesha with Riddhi and Siddhi on either side has also been illustrated in these panels. Brahma is depicted alongside Saraswati in one of the panels (Seth, 2003).

There is an interesting depiction of the procession of Gangaur festival, which is celebrated all over Rajasthan and had become a status symbol in the old royal days. This festival has been given a vibrant expression on the walls of the Chitrasala.

The longest panel covering the entire part adjacent to the ceiling depicts a traditional royal procession showing the King on horse-back followed by a large number of horses and elephants together with all the paraphernalia associated with such processions. There is a court-scene also under the panel. The animal hunting and floral motifs are also painted here. Different methods of hunting lions, boars and other animals have been vividly painted with attention bestowed on the minutes of details.



4.6 Characteristics of these Wall Paintings:

Hunting scene is a peculiar feature of the Bundi style of miniatures having no parallel in other styles of Rajasthan. In the paintings of hunting scenes, the artist has paid attention to each detail and reproduced them in realistic manner. Each depiction in the painting whether it is an animal or nature is microscopic.

Round faces, eyes like 'Parval', pointed nose and a long chin are some characteristics of this school. Light and shade has been used over the faces in a sophisticated style. In later stages, at some places some long faces have also been painted. Thick foliage and trees in a line is the specialty of Bundi. Banana (Kadli) trees have also been beautifully painted. The sky has been painted in different colours and mostly a light ribbon of red colour is visible in the sky which exhibits the special style in Bundi only. Clouds are also beautifully painted (Sharma, 1980).

At places, lonely ladies with pangs of love have been most beautifully painted in Bundi Chitrasala. The beautiful round faces with details of their figures and soft expressions would arrest the attention of the onlooker. Some of them wear Mughal dresses which are long and cover them, while some wear transparent gowns over clinging churidars (leggings) which reveal the slender contours of their bodies. Most of them wear the Rajasthani Lehngas with brief Cholis (bodices) and transparent Odhanis (veil).

The paintings here are mainly in a light green colour, thus giving a Persian effect. The dominant light green, blue and brown with red and black colours thrown in, provide a unique and distinct charm to the Chitrasala. Unfortunately, due to the exposure of this verandah to strong sunlight and wind, the original colours of most of these paintings have evaporated. Some of the vivid colours which have remained, especially royal blue, light green and maroon, indicate that in their original pristine state these paintings must have shown like bright, well-polished precious stones.



Figure 1 View of Bundi Chitrasala



Figure 2 Nayika, Bundi Chitrasala



Figure 3 Nayika, Bundi Chitrasala



Figure 4 Nayika, Bundi Chitrasala



Figure 5 Nayika, Bundi Chitrasala



Figure 6 Painted Panel in Bundi Chitrasala



Figure 7 Painted Panel in Bundi Chitrasala



Figure 8 Painted Panel in Bundi Chitrasala



Figure 9 Painted Panel in Bundi Chitrasala



5. Conclusion

The Chitrasala of Bundi has preserved the finest tradition of wall painting in Rajasthan. This is a protected monument and is looked after by the Archaeological Survey of India. The Chitrasala not only presents an astonishing world of people engaged in various amusements, religious beliefs, social customs etc. but it also presents a great tradition of the Bundi style of painting which culminated into perfection in the 17th Century. The wall painting showed a greater amount of freedom. With the availability of bigger frames, the sense of spacing was changed and the treatment of the background. The wall paintings also show a much wider range of subjects than is to be found in the miniatures.

No doubt the wall paintings of Bundi Chitrasala are marvelous pieces of art work, but many of these priceless panels of wall paintings have perished due to the carelessness of general public. It is the duty not only of the government to preserve these paintings but the common men too need to be made aware of its value and importance. Although, it is protected by the government, but many people do not even know about this prestigious monument. So, I have made an attempt through my research paper to spread the knowledge of this astonishing art work of Chitrasala, so that it will get more attention and the paintings of Chitrasala will get more worth recognition and appreciation than what it is getting at present.

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