



The Golden Period of Mewar Painting

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The Seventeenth Century was the golden period of the Mewar school of painting. By the 16th Century it had acquired its own independent identity having developed systematically as it was some where in the middle of the Period between 1628 and 1652 it blossomed with a new radiance and fragrance its high watermark came towards the end of 17th Century¹ it was then uniquely what is called the Mewar school of painting.

A Study of the contemporaneous paintings of the 17th Century and of the historical sources, brings out that the seeds of it had begun to sprout in the early 17th Century. these buds had their own originality and individuality² The fact is that a Fundamental change of reaching significance had already come over the traditional style of Mewar Painting towards the closing years of 16th Century³ Iranian inspiration enable the painters of these years to further refine and improve upon the existing style and pattern and perform new experiments⁴

There were two influences that mark the paintings of 17th century one was the fresh winds of cultural awakening that were sweeping through the indianpsyche the devotional and love poetry of j

JaidevVidhyapatiChandidas, TulsiMeera and Bihari had suffused the Indians particularly the Hindus with the thrill of high romance and deep devotion the people were floating along the heady currents of the poetry of devotion to the human gods or god with human qualities and this enviable influenced painting the artists turned the verbal images of poetry into visual images on the canvas it a life iustre and meaning with a unmatched splendor the second influence was that of the Mughal stylistics and motifs a result of understanding reached between the Mughal Emperor and the Mewar ruler this land a new evocative loveliness tenderness and grace to the Mewar school also⁵

The twenty four years during which Maharana Jagat Singh I (1628-1652A.D) occupied the throne passed in uninterrupted tranquility and Mewar region is indebted to him for the magnificent works, which bear his name. Mewar style of painting achieved its highest excellence in the period of Jagat Singh I. He was a devoted Vaishnava and a munificent patron of the art and architecture. He encouraged artists to execute beautiful Nayikabhedapictures⁶ His period also belongs the illustrations of various manuscripts.

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In keeping with the spirit of the Vaishnavite renaissance, incidents relating to the life and exploits of Krishna and his escapades with the gopis were also commonly depicted. So also Krishna's representation as the Great Lover' in the Hero Heroine' theme and in the musical Modes Of The Ragamala was a favourite subject⁷

The aesthetic achievement of early Mewar painting is indeed considerable. Though lacking. The technical excellence of the contemporary Mughal school, in draughtsmanship, perspective and fineness of finish, its glowing colours, attractive stylization and decorative treatment of landscape have a charm all their own.

We see that Mughal painting is essentially a court art, but the art of Mewar aspires towards the high ideals or deals with subjects which the people were acquainted and hence it covered a larger field. It reflected the beliefs and customs of the common people, thus producing an artistic folklore of unusual interest. Its chief aim, was to present the innumerable graphic aspects of their religion to the people in portable and popular manner, literally, for household use⁸ This resulted in a school of miniature painting, which is an outstanding feature of the pictorial art of Mewar.

Several examples can be quoted to show that the 17th century paintings of Mewar had maintained their distinctive quality even while assimilating external influences. We may here quote a few. Some of these paintings belonging to the reign of Jagat Singh between 1630 to 1640 A.D. are found in the National Art Gallery, Delhi and others in Shri Gopikrishna Collection of Art works in Patna. The latter are the paintings depicting Nayaka- Nayikabheda⁹ and Madhyadhira Nayika¹⁰ (Photo Plate No.) or subtle differences in the nature of women.

To almost the same period belong the paintings portraying the life and times of Lord Krishna, reflecting the poetry of Keshvadas in his work Rasikpriya and also of Surasagara with the life and the love plays of Lord Krishna, These paintings have been preserved in the Government Museum of Udaipur under the title Shri Krishna Charitra¹¹

We have paintings of Balakanda of Ramayana¹² by artist Manohar in the safe vaults of Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay. While the others like the paintings depicting Arsha Ramayana Aryanaka kand¹³ belonging to the year 1651 are preserved in the oriental Research Institute, Udaipur. These paintings of Arsha Ramayana illustrate the manner in which the Mewar and the Mughal character become blended together. The costumes of ladies are purely Mewari. The brilliant colour scheme belongs to Mewar art, but the drawing of figures and treatment of architecture is Mughal. The row of the warriors and their equipments, give us an idea of the grandeur and setting of social life and custom which were adopted in Mewar after the Mughal pattern. We also concite the art works relating to the subject of Ramayana in the London Museum, and also the paintings of Gita Govinda belonging to the period 1650 to 1651

A.D. now in Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay. Gita Govinda¹⁴ of Jaideva became the subject of aesthetically wonderful paintings and so also the pictures relating with surasagara¹⁵ are remarkable for their enduring beauty.

The other of immortal beauty are the paintings depicting the poetic subject matter of Rasikapriya and kavipriya¹⁶ and the paintings of Ragamala¹⁷ by Sahibdeen. Kalidas's Kumarsambhava¹⁸ and Bhagawata Purana¹⁹ as transformed into paintings are of imperishable beauty.

It was for the first time in the reign of Jagat Singh I that the paintings of Rasikapriya were made. Among various pictures of Rasikapriya only 83 pictures are preserved at Goernment Museum, Udaipur, the rest are preserved in other collections in India and abroad. These 83 pictures in the vaults of Udaipur museum, have Malwa influence upon them.

Around 1650 A.D. many feudatory chiefs of Mewar were appointed in the Sout and they showed great love towards arts in general and miniature paintings in particular. Mohan Singh Shaktawat, appointed at Aurangabad was one such Chief who represented Mewar in the Mughal army. He gave patronage to the artists and painters of Mewar and it was for whom Rasa Manjari illustrations were made by Mewar artists²⁰

On deep analysis of artistic productions of this period, we come across the tradition of miniature paintings which have a background of red, saffron and yellow with contrasting colour patches. Men and women have prominent noses, oval faces and fish shaped eyes. The women are somewhat short in stature, Men wear the plain gherdarjamaha, while the women folk are usually dressed in skirts, cholis and transparent odhanis²¹

All these leads to incontrovertible proof that a new awakening had swept Mewar both just before and during this period. A sea change seems to have over both in the visual perspective and stylistics of painting. It began to lean towards realism under the impact of the Mughal school.

The human face that had a slanted angle showing three fourth of it or one and one fourth of it or one and one fourth and one and a half by 15th century became ek-chasma in the 16th century are prevalent in 17th century also. Of 16th century which was a peculiar feature can also be noticed in the 17th century Mewar paintings. In this context we cannot help mentioning that the prominence of male nose had suffered a reduction and became heavier but in the females feature it more or less survived unchanged.

There is paucity of definitely dated material after Jagat Singh I, but judging from the examples that survive, it is apparent that the fine tradition of Mewar painting was continued in the reign of his successor Raj Singh I and (1652-1680A.D.) Jai Singh.

The state of Mewar had continued to make incessant attempts of consolidate and strengthen its honor and glory while at the same time developing the distinctive elements of its culture. The contribution of Rana Raj Singh to it is remarkable. He had an iron-will, his courage was impregnable and valour legendary and the sources of his inspiration remained undying; his insight was penetrating²¹

On acceding to the throne he made sustained and well-planned efforts to strengthen the state in every way. He completed its defense capabilities started by his illustrious father. His many initiatives reflect his towering ambitions.

There was a flurry of activities during his days. He was a clear-headed diplomat, too, never a prey to ephemeral sentimentalism. He faced every crisis with his hard-headed realism. If imperialistic were an answer to a crisis, so be it. The main thing was the glory of Mewar.

Some of the books illustrated then are :

1. Ramayana KaUttarakanda (1653 A.D.) : Artist Sahibdeen, British Museum, London.
2. ShukarKshetraMahatmay : (1655 A.D.) Pratap Museum, Udaipur.
3. Bhramara Gita (1659 A.D.) : National Museum, Delhi.
4. Gita Govinda and Ragamala (1655-1660 A.D.) :KunwarSangram Singh collection, Jaipur.
5. Shri Bhagwat (1663-1678 A.D.) : Oriental Research Institute, Udaipur.
6. BhagwataPurana (1680-1700 A.D.) : Bharat kala Bhawan, Varanasi²²

ShukarKshetraMahatmya painted by Sahibdeen and Bhramzara Gita Paintings of 1659 A.D. best illustrate the artistic beauty and splendor of the Mewar school²³

To study the paintings of Raj Singh's period as also of the preceding and following times it is immensely helpful to look at the paintings preserved in the Oriental Research Institute, Udaipur.

These paintings includeRagamala, (Photo Plate no. 1) Baramasa, Ekadasi mahatmya²⁴ Kadambari²⁵ (Photo Plate no. 2) etc. The paintings titled BilawalRagini (Photo Plate no. 3) and Gaur MalharRagini are most beautiful and artistic pieces produced in about 1660 A.D.²⁶

Of course, there has been no basic change in the Mewar style during the later period of 17th century, but the influence of Mughal style is quite oblivious. As the illustrations of this influence one must refer to the paintings related to BhagwataPurana. These show Lord Krishna' lifting aloft the Giriraja²⁷ mountain His play in the holy river of Yamuna etc.²⁸ The other one we must mention is that of Radha pining for her divine lover, Krishna²⁹ as described in Gita Govinda. (Photo Plate no. 4) These are remarkable for their life like quality and hold their own place in the art world as examples of Mewar style of paintings. All the same these

paintings have retained the original mark and identity of Jagat Singh's period and even while reflects the contemporary life style. Jai Singh (1680-1698 A.D.)

Jai Singh was a peaceful and liberal king, but lacked the personality of Raj Singh. His weak rule disorganized the administration. According to some art critics, Mewar school of painting began to decline³⁰ mainly because of Rana Jai Singh could not pay sufficient attention to this established tradition of art. This assertion is belied by the collection of paintings in the Government Museum of Udaipur. These paintings including such as Prithui raj Raso, Bhagwad Gita, Panchakhyan, Sarangdhar, Sarangtattua, Surasagara, Rasikpriya, Raghuvansha, Coming to about 5000 belong to his times. In fact, Sarangtattva, Bhagwad Gita, Panchakhyan set bear his name, thus facilitating time determination.

The Sarangdhar set of painting is also regarded as belonging to this period. These paintings are based on a book. Of the same name. The figures on them are shown into sharp relief by a thin yellow and red border. Enhancing their beauty.

The same is true of the 122 miniatures based on Surasagara. They too belong to the same period. Dense dark clouds dancing peacocks, majestic palaces, latticed casements and flower laden creepers have all been beautifully brought on the canvas, Mostly red, yellow, green, saffron colours have been used in them. Surasagarar paintings are anonymous but the plants No. 10 and 42 of bhagwad-Gita of the same period bear the name of Alabaugas, which makes clear that he was one of the prominent artist of Jai Singh's period.

One set of Raskpriya (Photo Plate no. 5) containing 88 miniatures also belong to the period of his reign. These follow the style of the times of Jagat Singh I. These paintings had once adorned the walls of a palace. The exposure naturally bedimmed their brightness, with lime further damaging them³¹

Religious paintings of excellence including the Ramayana and Mahabharata sets were produced during his regime. Human paintings in abundant number were also sketched distinctively in these sets and the same may be viewed in some pictures of Kishkindhakanda³² and the first picture there of Ganesh Pratisthan by Maharana Jai Singh is a remarkable piece. This proves that there was a rich tradition of getting Ramayana painted in Mewar. Alike, some other paintings of Bhagwat titled Gouerdhandharan (Photo Plate no. 6) (about 1680 A.D.) and Danaval Pan (Photo Plate no. 7) (about 1700 A.D.) can be seen in Bharat Kala Bhawan, Banaras and Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay respectively.

There came an important change in the style of Mewar paintings in about 1700 A.D. and ups and downs, thereof, are explained in later chapters.

References

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7. Bhishampal H., Historic Rajasthan, p. 5
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15. Choyal P.N., Mewar Ki Chitrakala,' Mewar through the Ages, (Ed.) D.L. Paliwal, p. 34
16. Painted in about 1650 A.D., now preserved in PratapSangranhalaya, Udaipur.
17. Preserved at Government Museum, udaipur.
18. Painted in about 1650 A.D., Now preserved at KunwarSangram Singh Collection, Jaipur
19. Painted by Artist Sabibudeen in 1648 A.D., now preserved at Bhandarkar Oriental Reseach Institute, Poona
20. Desai Siryu, Lalit kala, NO- 15, P. 19
21. Shukla D.N. VastuShastra,part II, Hindu Cannons of Iconography and Painting, p. 452
22. Moti Chandra, Mewar Painting, Cf. Description of Painting No. 5
23. Cf. Neeraj, Jai Singh., RajasthaniChitrakalaAur Hindi Krishna Bhrmargita in Mewar style, painted in 1659 A.D. are preserved at the National Museum Delhi.
24. Preserved at the Oriental Research Institute, Udaipur

25. Sharma G.N., Social Life in Medieval Rajasthan, P. 360
26. Both these pictures are preserved at KunwarSangram Singh Collection,
Jaipur
27. Motichandra, Mewar Painting, Plate no. 5
28. Sharma G.N., Social life in Medieval Rajasthan, p. 360
29. Motichandra, Mewar Painting, plate No. 4
30. Neeraj Jai Singh RajasthaniChitrakalaAur Hindi Krishna Kavya, p.30
31. Information from Khalil Tanvir, Curator, Government Museum,Udaipur
32. Preserved in the Collection of Maharaja of Jodhpur.