



National Seminar on
**SCHOOLS OF
ART IN INDIA**

Regional Variations in Sculptural
& Painting Traditions

**BOOK
OF ABSTRACTS**

25th – 26th April 2026
Mode: Online





P L E A C H I N D I A
F O U N D A T I O N

National Seminar

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CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE

It is with great pride and a deep sense of scholarly purpose that I extend my warmest greetings to all participants, paper presenters, and delegates attending this National Seminar on Schools of Art in India: Regional Variations in Sculptural and Painting Traditions, organised under the aegis of the Pleach India Foundation.

India's artistic heritage is among the most layered and richly differentiated art expression in the world. Across millennia, the subcontinent's diverse geographies, dynastic patronages, religious philosophies and material cultures have given rise to distinctive regional schools each bearing its own aesthetic vocabulary, iconographic conventions and technical mastery. From the monumental sculptural programmes of early temple architecture to the refined sensibilities of regional miniature painting ateliers, these traditions speak to the extraordinary plurality that defines Indian civilisation.

This seminar brings together scholars, researchers and practitioners to examine, with rigour and nuance, the regional dimensions of India's sculptural and painting heritage. The themes deliberated upon spanning early regional sculptural traditions, temple ornamentation, miniature painting schools, iconographic variation and contemporary revival movements represent some of the most vital and evolving discourses in the study of Indian art history. It is the Foundation's earnest hope that the papers presented here will not only deepen our understanding of these traditions in their historical contexts, but will also illuminate the enduring relevance of regional art schools in shaping India's cultural identity today.

At Pleach India Foundation, our mission has always been to bridge the space between academic inquiry and broader public engagement with India's cultural legacy. This seminar is a reflection of that commitment to foster scholarship that is both intellectually robust and meaningfully connected to the communities from which these traditions emerge. In an era increasingly shaped by rapid technological transformation, the humanities and art history in particular hold an indispensable role in anchoring us to the civilisational roots that give our present its depth and meaning.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all the members of the Organising Team and particularly to the scholars who have contributed their research to this volume of abstracts. The Pleach Ananda Coomaraswamy Award 2026,

instituted in honour of one of the greatest interpreters of Indian aesthetics, stands as a testament to the Foundation's recognition of excellence in research.

I commend this volume to all who cherish the study of India's artistic past, and I look forward to the rich intellectual exchanges that this seminar promises to engender.

Dr. Tejaswini Yarlagadda

Chairperson & Managing Trustee

Pleach India Foundation

Hyderabad, India

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Life Scenes of Buddha | 2nd century CE | Limestone | Amravati, Andhra Pradesh

S E S S I O N I

Early Iconographic & Stylistic Tradition

Chair: Dr. Emani Sivanagi Reddy, CEO Pleach India Foundation

Iconographic and Stylistic Variations in Resemblance to the Pāli Suttas

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Theravāda iconography in early India may be understood as a deliberate visual extension of the doctrinal world articulated in the Pāli Suttas. Rather than evolving as an autonomous artistic tradition, Buddhist architecture and sculpture functioned as material interpretations of canonical teachings, embedding theological meaning within spatial planning, symbolic motifs, and sculptural proportion.

The aniconic monuments of Sanchi Stupa and Bharhut Stupa exemplify this scriptural grounding. Their construction finds legitimacy in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, where the Buddha proclaims the worthiness of stūpa veneration. The anda, axial yasti, harmikā, and pradakṣiṇā organise ritual movement while embodying cosmological symbolism and spiritual ascent.

The recurring Dhammacaka directly echoes the doctrinal event described in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, signifying the turning of the Dhamma and the proclamation of the Four Noble Truths. The central teaching of Tilakkhana helps explain the early avoidance of anthropomorphic representation in favor of symbolic forms such as the Bodhi tree, Vajrasana, footprints, and parasol.

With the rise of anthropomorphic Buddha images at Mathura and their classical refinement at Sarnath, sculptural form adhered to the Lakkhaṇa Sutta, establishing canonical standards of proportion and physiognomy. Features such as the uṣṇīṣa, ūrṇā, elongated earlobes, and wheel-marked feet represent the systematic translation of textual description into visual canon.

Keywords: *Stupa, Suttas, aniconic, anthropomorphic*

Between Resemblance and Refusal: Gandharan Buddha Images Beyond Hellenism

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The tendency to read sculptural traditions through the lens of geography has shaped how art is understood. This paper examines Buddha images from the Gandhara School of Art, with particular attention to examples from Takht-i-Bahi and Jamal Garhi, to reconsider how so-called "Hellenistic" features operate within their sculptural logic.

Rather than treating deeply cut drapery, contrapposto stance, and modelled physiognomy as inherited traits, the study reads them as deliberate choices within local workshop practice. The cascading folds, often cited as classical, are handled with a repetition that resists naturalism — drawing attention away from anatomical accuracy toward surface rhythm, creating a visual cadence that stabilises the frontal presence of the figure.

Through close attention to the torso, the fall of drapery at the knees, and facial articulation across a limited corpus, the paper argues that these images are shaped not by passive reception but by acts of selection and recalibration. What is retained is not a style, but a set of visual tools reworked to meet the demands of Buddhist image-making: clarity, frontality, and sustained presence.

The argument is not that "Hellenism" is absent, but misrecognised — its elements folded into a sculptural intention that privileges stillness over movement, and encounter over illusion, within local practice.

Keywords: *Gandhara, Hellenistic, Sculpture*

Idiomatic Brawls: Analyzing the Art-historical Idioms of the Mankuwar Buddha Image

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Every epoch crafts its socio-cultural impressions in the artistic outlook and existential contours of its statuary a complex aggregation of stylistic innovation, cultural interpretation, doctrinal assertion, aesthetic lens, and symbolic economy, closely linked with the prevalent socio-political landscape of the times.

The Gupta Age felicitously embedded its own particular idiomatic feats in the sculptural conventions of the Buddha image, though one figure evades such sweeping categorization. The Mankuwar Buddha image, conceived during the culturally stimulative reign of Kumāragupta I (c. 416–448 CE), gives only faint compliance to Gupta-era art styles, prompting scholars to orient its attitude toward Kuṣāṇa-era idioms a contention yet to attain resolution.

This paper attempts to resolve this debate by suggesting that the Mankuwar Buddha image was part of the Gupta scheme to emulate and re-configure past idioms in structuring their own politico-cultural efflorescence. The proposition will be evidentially substantiated through archaeo-cultural records, study of stylistic trends, and socio-historical data from the Gupta period.

It is believed that the present study will open up a new venue to perceive and probe region-specific variations within imperial Gupta boundaries, adding another chapter to the history of Gupta Art.

Keywords: *Mankuwar Buddha image, Gupta Age, Stylistic trends, Art-historical Idioms, Kumāragupta*

Regional Aesthetics and Indigenous Continuity: Reinterpreting Yakshi Imagery from the Kushana-period Buddhist Site of Sanghol

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This paper discusses the sculptural tradition of Sanghol, a Kushana-period (1st–3rd c. CE) Buddhist site affiliated with the Mathura School of Art, located in Punjab. It reinterprets female sandstone figurines termed 'Yakshi' to uncover the symbolism embedded in the sculptures and to exhibit a continued regional artistic tradition.

Buddhism's inherently syncretic character enabled it to absorb indigenous traditions of fertility and non-canonical artistic forms. At Sanghol, this is manifested through a sustained focus on sensual and auspicious femininity and embodied spiritual vitality. The primary visual dataset comprises 117 Kushana-period railing sculptures mostly Yakshi figures that were presumably housed in the Sanghol Maha-stupa.

Using historical and iconographic analysis, ritual theory, and Critical and Descriptive methods, the paper argues that the female body, as a source of generative energy, has been consistently represented in ancient Indian sculptures, symbolising fertility, power, and spiritual wisdom.

Taking Sanghol as a case study, this paper reemphasises the argument of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy that the Buddhist iconographical repertoire in India developed directly from a much older indigenous art school, rather than imitating or deriving from the Hellenistic tradition.

Keywords: *Sanghol, Indigenous Traditions, Kushana Period, Mathura School of Buddhist Art, Yakshi*

Dikpāla Sculptures at Śiva Temple of Bavka, Dahod

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Shiva Temple, Bavka is situated around 14 km from Dahod, known as Dadhipadra Mandal during medieval times, as recorded in the Dahod Inscription of Siddharāja Jayasimha. The site served as a border region during the Solanki (Chaulukya) rulers of Gujarat, who ruled from 942 CE to 1244 CE a period considered the Golden Age of Gujarat.

These rulers were great patrons of art and architecture, instrumental in evolving the Maru-Gurjara style of the regional temple-building tradition of Western India, as described in the architectural treatise *Aparājitaṛcchā*. The temple at Bavka was built by Bhima II, the last Chaulukya ruler, during the 13th century CE.

Though in ruins, the temple displays artistic endeavour at its best, exhibiting Maru-Gurjara aesthetics in its elaborate Pitha and Mandovara, with great sculptural wealth in the framed niches of Janghā. Of particular importance are the dikpālas or lokapālas all eight aṣṭadikpālas are present in the ruined sanctum walls, making this an exceptional scholarly resource.

Keywords: *Maru-Gurjara, Solanki, Aparājitaṛcchā, aṣṭadikpālas*

Evolution in Sculptural Finesse: From Caves to Temples in the Deccan Region of India

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The Deccan region of India presents a rich continuum of artistic and architectural traditions, particularly in the evolution of sculptural finesse from early rock-cut caves to fully developed structural temples. Sculpture acted as a continuum of artistic knowledge, technique, and symbolism, linking successive dynasties despite differences in time, material, and political power.

This paper examines the evolution and transformation of sculptural ornamentation in temple architecture across the Deccan Plateau, with particular focus on Telangana. Tracing a chronological trajectory from the 6th-century rock-cut cave temples of Badami Caves to the monumental excavations of Ellora Caves and the structural temple traditions of the Kakatiya period, the study investigates how sculptural forms transitioned in scale, expression, and architectural integration.

Particular attention is given to the evolution of motifs including gandharvas, dwarapalas, dwarapalikas, and shalabhanjikas (madanikas), analysing their changing iconography, proportion, and spatial placement. The paper also explores the role of materiality and technological advancements investigating how innovations in stone-working contributed to refinement of sculptural detailing.

Through this interdisciplinary approach, the paper provides a comprehensive understanding of how sculptural ornamentation not only enhanced visual richness but also played a critical role in defining the architectural identity of temples in Telangana and the wider Deccan.

Keywords: *School of arts, Transfer of knowledge, Shilpa kala, Rastrakutas, Chalukyas, Kakati*

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Mabhasuramardini rock relief sculpture | 7th-8th centuries CE | Granite | Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu

S E S S I O N I I

Regional Schools of Art

Chair: Dr. Manjil Hazarika, Assistant Professor, Department of Archaeology,
Cotton University

Regional Schools of Temple Sculpture in North-Western Karnataka: Form, Iconography and Ornamentation

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Independent researcher

The temple sculpture of north-western Karnataka represents a crucial yet relatively underexplored field for understanding the formation of regional artistic schools in the early medieval Deccan. This paper examines the development of sculptural traditions from the period of the Kadamba dynasty to the Ratta dynasty, with particular emphasis on the formative contributions of the Chalukyas of Badami, Chalukyas of Kalyan and Rashtrakootas.

Adopting a comparative and analytical approach, the study focuses on three key aspects: formal composition, iconographic representation and ornamental articulation. The early experimental phase is examined through the temple complexes at Halasi, then Aihole, Badami Caves and Pattadakal, where diverse structural and sculptural forms establish the foundation of Deccan temple architecture. This is further developed through later sites such as Trikuteshwara Temple at Gadag and Chandramouleshwara Temple at Dharwad, which demonstrate increasing refinement in iconography and ornamentation. The temples at Halasi and the Jain monument of Kamala Basadi at Belagavi further reflect regional diversity in religious and artistic expression.

The study also considers border regions, including the Kopeswar Temple in present-day Maharashtra, to highlight the fluidity of artistic boundaries and cross-regional interactions. It also highlights the role of artisans, workshop practices and transmission of skills in shaping regional styles.

By analysing these examples, the paper argues that north-western Karnataka witnessed the emergence of distinct yet interconnected regional sculptural schools, evolving from early experimentation to highly developed artistic traditions. This study underscores the importance of localised frameworks in interpreting the complexity of Indian temple art within the broader Deccan context.

Keywords: *Temple Sculpture, North-Western Karnataka, Regional Schools of Art, Iconography, Ornamentation*

Terrific Forms and Regional Expressions: An Iconological Study of Bhairava Sculptures in the Hoysāḷa School of Art

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Śiva, a deity worshipped in both iconic and aniconic forms, occupies a distinctly ambivalent position within the Hindu pantheon, embodying both benevolent and fearsome attributes. As the destructive principle within the Trimūrti, he frequently manifests in terrifying forms that underline his complex nature. Among these fierce manifestations, Bhairava emerges as a particularly significant form within the literary and artistic traditions of India. The very appellation “Bhairava,” connoting the “terrific” or “frightful,” encapsulates the intensity and symbolic depth inherent to this deity. As noted by Stella Kramrisch, the iconography of Bhairava exhibits one of the widest ranges of variation within sculptural art, a feature that finds particularly rich expression in the productions of the Hoysāḷa school. The Hoysāḷa dynasty, emerging from the forested regions of the Western Ghats in the late 11th century, encompassed much of present-day Karnataka at its zenith before its decline in the mid-14th century. The considerable wealth accumulated by the rulers and their subordinates through trade and warfare facilitated the construction of numerous temples, with both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects receiving royal patronage from an early period. In the majority of temples commissioned under them, irrespective of the principal deity enshrined in the sanctum, the sub-shrines and exterior walls incorporate a comprehensive sculptural programme depicting diverse deities from the Hindu pantheon.

This paper examines the sculptural representations of Bhairava within the Hoysāḷa school of art, highlighting variations in hairstyle, weaponry, and attendant figures, as such differences are observable not only among sculptures from different chronological phases but also within those situated on the walls of the same temple. Through a critical analysis of the Purāṇas, Āgamas, and epigraphic records, this study seeks to contextualise and account for the underlying factors contributing to these iconographic variations.

Keywords: *Bhairava, Hoysāḷa Sculptures, Śaivism, Temple Art*

The Sculptural Heritage of Kamakhya Temple and the Regional Identity of Assamese Sacred Art

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Lovely Professional University

The Kamakhya Temple, situated on Nilachal Hill in Assam, holds a significant position in the cultural and artistic history of India. Although the temple is widely recognised as one of the most important centres of Shakta worship, its sculptural and architectural features also offer valuable insight into the development of regional artistic traditions in northeastern India.

This paper examines the sculptural heritage of Kamakhya Temple with particular attention to its iconographic motifs, architectural ornamentation, and stylistic characteristics that contribute to the formation of a distinct Assamese sacred art tradition. Through a visual and contextual analysis of the temple's sculptural elements, the study explores how local beliefs, tantric symbolism, regional craftsmanship, and patterns of patronage shaped its artistic identity.

The paper also considers the relationship between Kamakhya's sculptural vocabulary and broader Indian temple traditions, highlighting both continuity and regional variation. By focusing on the temple as an important example of sacred art, the study seeks to demonstrate how Kamakhya reflects the interaction between religious devotion, cultural symbolism, and local aesthetic practices. In doing so, it positions the temple within the larger discourse of Indian art history as a significant site for understanding the diversity of regional schools of sculpture and architectural expression.

The paper ultimately argues that the sculptural program of Kamakhya Temple is not only a manifestation of religious belief but also an enduring marker of Assam's cultural identity and artistic heritage. Thus, Kamakhya Temple stands as a powerful example of how regional traditions enrich the broader narrative of Indian art.

Keywords: *Kamakhya Temple, Assamese Sacred Art, Temple Sculpture, Regional Art Traditions, Shakta Tradition*

Heroes, Heads and Goddesses: An Analysis of Self-Sacrifice before Kor̥ravai- Durgā in the Pallava School of Art

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The act of self-mutilation and self-decapitation before Kor̥ravai, the ancient Tamil war Goddess, occupies a distinctive place in the devotional and martial ideology of early Tamilakam. References scattered across the Sangam corpus, including the *Puṛaṇāṇūru*, *Akaṇāṇūru*, and *Paṭiṛruppattu*, attest to this practice as an expression of heroic honour, battlefield vow, and propitiatory offering, establishing a textual foundation that predates its material representation by several centuries. The sculptural panels from the Pallava period, depicting Goddess Durgā, multi-armed and standing atop the buffalo demon, were incorporated by the sculptors of the time not as a foreign deity but as the Goddess Kor̥ravai in Durgā's form. While the Goddess retains her essential character as a fierce and triumphant deity against evil, the Pallava-period representations of her imagery reveal a nuanced evolution in relation to the sacrificing figure flanking her. Initial observations of the panels depict two devotees at the goddess's feet: one actively performing self-mutilation (*Navakaṇḍam*) and the other in adoration or performing self-decapitation (*Aṛikaṇḍam*). The two devotee figures, therefore, represent two phases of the devotional continuum: the figure in adoration about to take the vow, and the figure actively performing self-decapitation. This paper argues that the Pallava rendering of the self-sacrificing tradition to Kor̥ravai constitutes a regionally specific iconographic program, reflecting the intersection of indigenous Tamil Goddess theology with the evolving sculptural conventions of Pallava artistic idioms. Drawing on evidence from rock-cut sculptures and free-standing stone icons distributed across the Pallava cultural zone that encompasses the ancient division of *Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam*, the study traces how Kor̥ravai's identity as a Goddess of war was adapted and regionally reflected within the Pallava sculptural framework.

Keywords: *Durgā-Kor̥ravai, Pallava Sculptures, Self-Sacrifice, Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam*

Prescribing the Goddess: Textual Iconography and Sculptural Practice of Tara in Pala Art

Dr Pallabi Bagchi

Independent Researcher

This paper investigates the relationship between prescriptive iconographic texts and the sculptural representation of Tara in Pala art (c. 8th-12th centuries CE), with particular focus on the *Sādhanamālā* and Abhayākaragupta's *Niṣpannayogāvalī*. Rather than treating textual descriptions as directly mirrored in visual form, the study examines how specific prescriptions regarding posture (*lalitāsana*), attributes such as the *utpala*, hand gestures, and attendant figures are selectively translated in stone and bronze images from this period.

A close comparison of textual formulations with a corpus of Pala sculptures of Tara demonstrates that while core iconographic identifiers of Tara are consistently maintained, several prescribed elements are either simplified or omitted in practice. For instance, elaborate ornamental details described in the texts are frequently absent or reduced in sculptural examples, while attendant figures, donative inscriptions and compositional clarity are prioritised. These patterns suggest that workshop conventions and the constraints of the medium played a significant role in shaping the final image.

The paper also distinguishes between iconographic adherence and stylistic articulation. While the iconographic schema remains largely stable, stylistic features such as the modelling of the body, treatment of drapery, and ornamentation vary across regions within the Pala sphere, indicating localised and sub-regional sculptural idioms. Such variations do not alter the deity's identity but rather inflect its visual presentation.

By situating Tara within a text–image framework grounded in specific objects and prescriptions, this study argues for a model of structured adaptation rather than strict replication, highlighting artists' interpretive role within a canonically informed system. It further draws attention to regional, sub-regional, and localised variations within the broader Pala sculptural tradition, as evidenced through a focused study of Tara images.

Keywords: *Tara, Pala-art, Sadhanamala, Niṣpannayogavali, Iconogr*

Anthropology of Indigenous Expression: A Study of Cave Art Practices in Dadi Block of Hazaribagh

Dr Abhishek Chauhan

Co-authors: Dr. Krishna Gope

Sarala Birla University

The cave art traditions of Jharkhand, particularly in the Dadi Block of Hazaribagh, represent a unique intersection of prehistoric heritage and living indigenous culture. Rock paintings in nearby sites such as Isko depict animals, hunting scenes, and symbolic motifs, reflecting early human interaction with nature and survival strategies. Anthropologically, these artworks function as visual narratives that document tribal life, belief systems, and ecological adaptation, offering insights into early human cognition and social organization in evolving environments.

These artistic expressions reveal a deep relationship between indigenous communities and their environment, where nature is viewed as sacred and integral to daily life and survival. The symbols often represent fertility, agricultural cycles, and spiritual beliefs, highlighting the socio-cultural values embedded in tribal traditions and collective practices. Such representations act as cultural texts that transmit indigenous knowledge across generations while reinforcing identity, continuity, and social cohesion among communities over long historical periods.

In the Jharkhand context, this tradition continues through living art forms like Sohrai Painting and Khovar Art, primarily practiced by tribal women within households and community spaces. These forms maintain thematic continuity with cave art and are closely linked to festivals, rituals, and social practices.

Thus, the cave art of Dadi Block is not only an archaeological legacy but also an enduring anthropological expression of identity, cultural continuity, and sustainable living among the tribal communities of Jharkhand presently.

Keywords: *Cave Art, Hazaribagh, Anthropological Perspective, Tribal Culture, Indigenous Knowledge*

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Chennakeshava Temple, Somanathapura | 13th Century CE | Soapstone (chloritic schist) | Mysuru, Karnataka

S E S S I O N I I I

***Regional Variations in Temple Architecture &
Decorative Elements***

Chair: Dr. Raghavendra Kulkarni, Professor & HOD, Karnataka Chitrakala
Parishath

Stone as Storyteller: A Comparative Study of Architectural Ornamentation in the Nagara and Dravida Temple Traditions

Rajshri Chowdhury

Bankura University

The evolution of religious architecture in the Indian subcontinent is a testament to a sophisticated visual language where the sacred structure serves as a primary canvas for regional artistic expression. This research paper provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of the most dominant Nagara Architecture of Northern India and the Dravida Style of the Southern peninsula. While both traditions originated from a shared ideological foundation, their physical manifestations evolved into distinct aesthetic identities, heavily influenced by local geography, available building materials, and the specific aesthetic preferences of regional dynasties.

The core of this study examines how Architectural Ornamentation serves as a diagnostic tool to differentiate these two traditions. In the Nagara tradition, characterized by the beehive-shaped Shikhara, the ornamentation is often curvilinear and integrated into the very silhouette of the structure, as seen in the Khajuraho and Orissan temples. Conversely, the Dravida tradition emphasizes a pyramidal Vimana and monumental Gopurams, where the sculpture is organized in distinct, horizontal tiers. This paper analyzes how Temple Sculpture in the North tends towards high-relief, fluid human forms, whereas the South displays a preference for repetitive, iconic motifs and a rigid structural hierarchy.

By investigating these diverse artistic expressions, the paper highlights how environmental factors, such as the use of sandstone in the North versus granite in the South, dictated the intricacy of the carvings and the overall Regional Variation. Ultimately, this research argues that these variations are not merely decorative but represent a profound shift in how sacred space is perceived and constructed across different eras. By understanding these nuances, we gain a deeper appreciation for the broader landscape of Indian Art History that continues to define the nation's cultural heritage today.

Keywords: *Nagara Architecture, Dravida Style, Temple Sculpture, Architectural Ornamentation, Indian Art History*

Cave and Structural Temples of Chalukya of Vatapi (6th-8th century CE)

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Temples are a very important manifestation of the concept of bhakti which houses the deity in it. During the Gupta period, a firm foundation of temple architecture was laid. However, the plans of temples built in the post-Gupta period became extremely elaborate. This phase inaugurated three distinct temple building styles: Nagara, Dravida and Vesara. The variations in temple styles evolved not on the basis of religious affiliations but in the context of geography and chronology. The temple walls too came to be richly ornamented with reliefs depicting deities and mythological scenes.

This paper will give insight about the architectural styles of some of the magnificent temples of Aihole, Pattadakal, Mahakuta and Badami built by Vatapi Chalukyas around Malaprabha River. Since the region mostly plays an important role in providing the basic raw material of the architectural structures of any area, an attempt is made to look into this aspect as well, especially as Chalukyas of Vatapi flowered in present state of Karnataka.

Most of these temples received royal patronage. The patronage to these temples also ensured that these rulers were remembered for posterity and also for legitimization of their political authority. The other interesting architectural feature is the evolution of temple complexes instead of single standing temples. These temple complexes were not merely places of worship but also were important social, economic and political institutions. The region around Vatapi, rich in sandstone-quartzite hills rising at places to considerable heights, held out immense opportunity for both cave and structural temples.

Thus, the focus of the paper will be on architectural style, iconography and the effect of the region on these temples of Vatapi.

Keywords: *Malaprabha River, Iconography, cave temples, structural temples*

The Sense of Geometry and Proportion in Art as Conditioned by Medieval Hindu Temples

Dr Tanisha Dutta

Director, SKEPL

India has been home to various art styles and schools of art over her vast civilisational history. These styles have coexisted, intermingled, evolved and matured to some of the finest in the world. May it be painting, sculpture, textile etc, they have all helped shape the visual culture in the subcontinent. But one art form stands the test of time and influences all the mentioned areas of art deeply i.e. Temple Ornamentation. Temple Ornamentation, incorporates and dictates all the aspects of human life.

By simply being the most visited space as a centre of culture, centre of education and centre of administration, the temple was essentially the centre of daily life during ancient and medieval times. With this thought, the author recognises the importance of temple structures and its impact on human minds by being the largest influence on a temporal as well as a physical scale. This research answers the question 'why' this happens and explains the connection between temple geometry and geometry of human anatomy.

This research therefore establishes the deep similarity between the geometry of temple ornamentation and human anatomy. It explains the process by which the human mind is influenced by temple geometrical principles and why it cannot resist its attraction, whether or not one understands the deep metaphorical meanings of these structures. These geometric principles, once engrained in our sub-conscious, become hard-wired into our sense of aesthetics and are then seen in all other areas of art. This research makes it clear that temple structures are not merely aesthetics of ornamentation, but a carefully calculated and harmoniously organised set of geometrical principles.

Keywords: *Temple Architecture, Fractal Geometry, Pingala Ratio, Aesthetics, Temple Ornamentation*

Art and Architecture of Bugga Ramalingeswara Temple, Thadipatri

Chadalavada Venkatesh

Yogi Vemana University

The Bugga Ramalingeswara Temple in Thadipatri is a complex of shrines adorned with magnificent sculptural forms that vividly showcase the artistic prowess of the Vijayanagara kings and the finesse of the Vijayanagara School of Art. An inscription, dated 1509 A.D., belonging to the reign of Vira Narasingarāya mentions that mahā pradhana Saḷuva Timmayamgaru constructed the Bhogamantapa, gopura and prakara in that year. Timmayamgaru a member of the Saluva dynasty and a vassal king of the Vijayanagara Empire. This temple is located on the eastern bank of the Penna River. Exquisitely beautiful sculptures, carved from intricately worked granite, adorn the temple's northern, southern, and western towers. Carved upon these towers are scenes from the Shiva Purana, various stories of Lord Shiva, the Dashavatara (ten incarnations of Vishnu), the Dikpalas (guardians of the directions), and numerous other deities. Furthermore, sculptures depicting dance forms and cultural traditions, reflecting the local heritage of the surrounding region have also been carved here. Several other sculptures serve purely decorative purposes. With their rich ornamentation, these sculptures bear a striking resemblance to the artistic style of the Hoysala dynasty; additionally, the manner in which the female figures have been sculpted distinctly reflects the characteristic style of the Vijayanagara era. Apart from the towers, numerous sculptures have also been carved onto the pillars within the Natya Mandapa. Furthermore, Miniature style decorative paintings can be seen on the temple's ceiling. This temple complex is dedicated to Shiva, Parvati, and Rama. The temples of Parvati and Rama share a common precinct. In this temple complex, among this group of temples, the Kalyana Mandapa was constructed, featuring pillars adorned with 'Yalis'.

Keywords: *Shiva, Dhashavatara, Dikpalaka, Gandaberunada, Sharabha*

P L E A C H I N D I A
F O U N D A T I O N

National Seminar

Schools of Art in India: Regional Variations in Sculptural & Painting Traditions



Apsara | 12th century CE | Sandstone | Bundelkhand, Madhya Pradesh

S E S S I O N I V

***Indian Art: Ornamentation, Jewellery & Material
Nuances***

Chair: Dr. Sandeep Sharma, Deputy Director, Center for Resources and Training, New Delhi

Regional Disparities and Material Nuances in Śuṅga Ornamentation: An Exegesis of the Gangetic and Central Indian Jewellery Repertoire

Ruhi Priya

National Institute of Fashion Technology, Delhi

This research paper provides a comprehensive evaluation of the personal ornamentation practices during the Śuṅga period in early historic India (circa 185–73 BCE). Moving beyond the traditional, monolithic approach to ancient Indian art history, this study systematically analyses the profound regional and material disparities that shaped jewellery design across different geographies. By contrasting the subtractive, almost life-sized stone reliefs of Central Indian urban centres like Bharhut with the additive, highly plastic terracotta plaques of the Gangetic valley, specifically from sites such as Kaushambi, Chandraketugarh, and Tamluk, the paper demonstrates how raw materials directly dictated aesthetic forms and structural possibilities. In the lithic traditions of Central India, ornaments such as the architectural *prākāra-vaprakuṇḍala* (ear ornaments) and the Hellenistic-influenced honeysuckle *graiivyekas* (collars) are worn to enhance the contours of the figures, reflecting a refined, cosmopolitan elite patronized by wealthy merchants and royalty. Conversely, the malleable riverine clays of Bengal facilitated a radically different vernacular aesthetic, characterized by an unrestrained profusion of bulk and profuse layering. This is most vividly encapsulated by the *pañchachūḍā* headdresses, where intricate hairpins bearing martial and agrarian emblems functioned as localized, fertility-driven religious icons for the masses. Furthermore, this research investigates the advanced metallurgical transmissions of the era, particularly the assimilation of post-Achaemenid granulation and repoussé techniques by indigenous jewellers. By mapping these ancient adornments against surviving ethno-archaeological traditions, such as the *patrakuṇḍalas* still worn by indigenous communities and the enduring craft of granulation work, this study underscores how Śuṅga jewellery functioned not merely as decorative vanity, but as a complex socio-economic and cultural language that continues to resonate in contemporary South Asian design.

Keywords: *Śuṅga Art, Jewellery History, Ancient Indian Jewellery, Bharhut Reliefs, Śuṅga Terracottas*

Aesthetics of the Lakshmi-Narayan sculptures from Hinglajgarh

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Government Arts College, Gujarat

Sculptures are an important aspect of Indian culture and heritage. Sculptures of various deities have been found across different cultural backgrounds since ancient times. Lakshmi-Narayan sculptures are one such example which represents the two deities Lakshmi and Narayan together. According to various Puranas, Narayan is the Para Brahman (supreme being) who is transcendent and represents consciousness; Vishnu is often considered as the manifestation of Narayan within the material universe, and thus often interchanged in worship and Puranic literature. Lakshmi is described as the supreme goddess of wealth, power and beauty and as an embodiment of auspiciousness; she is often associated with Sri. These deities are important individually yet when Lakshmi-Narayan are represented together, they symbolize a divine union between cosmic balance (Narayan) and wealth (Lakshmi). These dual deities are described as consorts in literature and thus are also represented together in sculptures many times beginning from the Early Medieval period. Many such sculptures of Lakshmi-Narayan are found from the site of Hinglajgarh which is located in Bhanpura Tehsil of Mandasaur district of Madhya Pradesh; these are currently in collections of various museums across the state. These sculptures are often associated with Paramara patronage (9th to 14th century CE) based on art style in the context of Malwa region, and thus affiliated to the Early Medieval period.

The aim of this research paper is to study and analyze the transforming aesthetics and representation of the Lakshmi-Narayan sculptures from the site of Hinglajgarh over the centuries. This study is conducted on the basis of sculptures in the collections of State Museum, Bhopal; Birla Museum, Bhopal and Central Museum, Indore.

Keywords: *Aesthetics, Iconography, Sculptures, Style*

Art and Iconography of Ancient Kaman Region (Rajasthan)

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Kaman, located at the confluence of Delhi, Rajputana, and Uttar Pradesh, occupies a strategic position that has historically made it a significant cultural and political hub. Dynasties such as Yadavas, Gurjara-Pratiharas, Delhi Sultanate, Kachhwahas, Mughals and Jats have ruled here. Today, Kaman is a tehsil of Deeg district of Rajasthan, yet its ancient heritage continues to draw scholarly attention for its distinctive contributions to Indian art.

The Kaman region is very rich in terms of art and architecture. Some of kaman's most remarkable artistic accomplishments are the stone sculptures of Hindu deities, such as Shiva-Parvati Parinaya, Chaturmukha Shivalinga, Nar-Varah, Shesh-shayi Vishnu, Brahma, Surya, Ganesha, Kubera, Navgrah panel (Ashtagrah) etc. These sculptures show a rich iconographic language, where figures' gestures, attributes, and ornamental motifs convey mythological narratives and local devotional practices. Some sculptures obtained from Kaman are found today in the Government Museum of Ajmer, the Government Museum of Bharatpur and outside the country in museums of London and America. Kaman has been an important center of art and culture since ancient times, influenced by the traditions of the Braj region.

In this paper, we will closely study the sculptures of Kaman and explain the details of their iconography-the style, symbols and cultural background. We will also discuss how they were influenced by both religion and the patrons and rulers who supported them. Kaman's sculptures give us a clear picture of local devotion, artistic skill, and the cultural importance of this lesser-known but remarkable center of Rajasthani art.

Keywords: *Art, Sculpture, Kaman, Museums, Culture*

Carving Ascetic Landscapes: Iconography and Stylistic Variations of Jain Bas-Relief Sculptures in the Rock Beds of the Madurai Region

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Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology

Indian sculptural traditions are marked by strong regional identities shaped by geography, patronage and religious practices. Within this framework, the rock bed sites of the Madurai region represent a distinctive sculptural landscape, where ascetic practice and visual expression intersect. Alagarmalai, Arittapatti, Anamalai and many such sites preserve early monastic spaces in which bas-relief carvings were directly integrated into natural rock formations.

This paper examines the iconography and stylistic variations of Jain bas-relief sculptures, focusing on Tirthaṅkara representations in kāyotsarga and padmāsana, alongside attendant Yakṣa–Yakṣī figures. It analyzes features such as the selective use of lanchanas and the use of prabhāmaṇḍalas, reflecting the ideologies and principles of Jain asceticism.

The study identifies variations in degrees of relief execution, ranging from incised linear carvings to more developed bas-relief forms. This qualitative classification, based on visual analysis of available imagery, is used to explore differences in sculptural treatment, anatomical modeling and stylistic expression across sites in and around Madurai.

The paper argues that these sculptures constitute a distinct regional “micro-school,” characterized by minimalism, site-specific adaptation and a close integration with ascetic landscapes. It further proposes a preliminary stylistic typology for Jain bas-reliefs in the Madurai region, addressing a critical gap in South Indian art history.

This study highlights the role of marginal and monastic spaces in shaping sculptural traditions. It also underscores the urgent need for systematic documentation and conservation of these fragile carvings, which are vital to reconstructing the cultural and religious history of early historic Tamil Nadu. This study is based on the analysis of published images and secondary sources and is intended as a preliminary framework for future field-based investigation.

Keywords: *Jainism, Bas-relief Sculpture, Rock-beds, Madurai, Iconography*

One Shakti and Seven Divine Powers: An Interpretation of the Saptamatrika in Tantric and Yogini Aspects

Shreya Tripathi

Banasthali Vidyapith

In Hindu tradition, the Saptamatrika (Seven Mothers) are known as mother goddesses. Their names are Brahmani, Vaishnavi, Maheshwari, Indrani, Kaumari, Varahi, and Chamunda. These are a group of mother goddesses, each representing the Shakti (female aspect) of a major deity. They hold a unique place in the social and sacred aspects of Indian communities. Besides their ties to major deities like Brahmani as Brahma, Vaishnavi as Vishnu, Maheshwari as Shiva, Indrani as Indra, Kaumari as Kumara (Kartikeya), Varah as Varaha (an avatar of Vishnu), Chamunda as Yama (form of Durga/Kali). Traditionally, these seven goddesses protect homes and represent the collective feminine power. Their worship originated in ancient folk traditions and later found mention in the Puranas.

In these texts, each Matrika is seen as the energy of a main god. Their presence is both domestic and divine, showing how crucial these are to community life. This paper will highlight the Tantric significance of the Saptamatrika and their role as embodiments of Shakti in secret ritual systems. Their links to Yogini cults, Smasana rituals, and special worship sites show their importance in practices that aim to harness transformative and protective spiritual power. This study will also explore how the Matrikas function within the chakra system as a core part of Tantric knowledge. Furthermore, it will examine the Saptamatrika not only as religious concepts but also as dynamic subjects in Indian sculptural and painting traditions. This paper explores the continued relevance of the Saptamatrika in the study of Indian art history and highlighting their function as protective mandalas. In the research methodology, primary Vedic and Tantric texts; and secondary sources will be evaluated.

Keywords: *Saptamatrika, Smasana Ritual, Tantra, Yogini Traditions, Sculptural Variation*

P L E A C H I N D I A
F O U N D A T I O N

National Seminar

Schools of Art in India: Regional Variations in Sculptural & Painting Traditions



Krishna lifts Mount Govardhan | 17th Century CE | Rajput miniature painting | Bikaner, Rajasthan

S E S S I O N V

Regional Schools of Miniature Painting

Chair: Dr. Rajkumar Mazinder, Associate Professor, Dept. of Visual Art,
Assam University, Silchar

Patrons, Pantheons and Pictorial Piety: Tracing the Evolution of the Mandi School of Painting

Tanushree Midha

Independent Researcher

The Mandi school of paintings, like most other schools, emulates the social, cultural, and religious milieu of its locale of origin, adding in regional elements as well as neighbouring influences. Falling under the umbrella of the Pahari school of paintings, the Mandi school, named after its locus of origin, was patronized by the Sen dynasty of Mandi, who were considered to have been descendants of the Sena dynasty of Eastern India.

Amongst the lyricism of the Kangra paintings and the vitality of the Basohli paintings, the Mandi school expresses its individuality with its thematic focus on Shakta and Tantric deities and elements as the muses for its artistic expression. While the prevalence of Shakta and Tantric deities such as Durga and Kali was not uncommon in other schools of painting at the time, what becomes fascinating is how patronage, dynastic devotions and neighbouring influences are incorporated in depictions, creating a visual archive of the beliefs, culture and reign of Mandi and its people.

This study tries to trace the evolution of the Mandi school of paintings, which was active from the 17th century till the 19th century, through the depiction of Shakta Tantric deities, focusing on three major paintings, to serve as representatives for the three centuries of the existence of the Mandi school of paintings. By consulting the works of Catherine Glynn and B.N. Goswamy and using iconographical analysis, symbolism, and regionalism, this study tries to position these paintings not just in terms of its singular existence, but in terms of the society it was produced in and the intention it was produced with, while looking at how it changed over three centuries.

Keywords: *Mandi, Tantra, Shakta, Sen dynasty, Devi*

The Garhwal School of Painting in Context: A Comparative Study within the Pahari Tradition

Prachi Petwal

Independent Researcher

This paper re-examines the Garhwal School of Painting within the broader category of Pahari Painting, interrogating the art historical tendency to subsume diverse regional practices under a unified stylistic framework. While “Pahari painting” has often been constructed as a coherent and homogeneous category, such consolidation risks obscuring the specificity of localized aesthetic formations and their distinct historical trajectories. Positioning Garhwal as a critical site of analysis, the paper argues that its visual language, evident in the works of artist Mola Ram, articulates a mode of representation that resists easy assimilation into dominant stylistic narratives. The paper highlights its characteristic visual language marked by lyrical landscapes, fluid linework, and a nuanced integration of emotion and environment. In contrast to the refined naturalism and devotional romanticism of the Kangra school, and the bold chromatic intensity and stylized forms of the Basohli school, Garhwal painting articulates a more intimate and atmospheric mode of representation. Through a comparative analysis of line, colour, composition, and thematic emphasis, the paper argues that Garhwal emerges not merely as a variant within a larger stylistic grouping, but as a distinct regional formation shaped by specific historical, geographic, and patronage contexts. The paper further contends that the twentieth-century revival and canonization of Pahari painting, particularly through the interventions of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, contributed to the consolidation of a homogenized category that privileged aesthetic unity over regional differentiation. Such historiographic frameworks continue to inform museum display, academic discourse, and heritage narratives. By critically revisiting these categorizations, the study foregrounds Garhwal as a lens through which the limits of such art historical constructs can be understood. In doing so, it underscores the continued relevance of regional specificity in rethinking Indian art history as a plural, differentiated, and regionally grounded field.

Keywords: *Garhwal School of Painting, Pahari Painting, Regional Aesthetics, Art Historiography, Indian Miniature Painting*

From Imperial Courts to Regional Aesthetics: Artistic Migration and the Transformation of Mughal Painting in Awadh

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Visual art and creative expression form a vital dimension of human culture, elevating humankind toward aesthetic experience. Painting traditions in India, particularly those rooted in its ancient heritage, may be broadly categorized into two principal forms: murals and miniatures, the latter executed on a small scale on perishable materials such as paper and cloth, often for manuscripts or as *murakka* (albums). This article explores the evolution of miniature painting traditions in post-Mughal Awadh in North India. Regional miniature schools emerged as a significant means of sustaining India's cultural heritage, functioning as visual records of the past and underscoring the enduring importance of art in cultural life. Since 1907, when Charles Lang Freer began collecting Indian Mughal paintings and manuscripts, the Freer Gallery of Art has become a leading center for studying and preserving Mughal art, known for its high-quality, often imperial collections. Mughal artists from various regions traveled to Delhi to learn the imperial style, then returned home and blended it with local traditions, creating provincial Mughal painting, a dynamic synthesis resulting from the interaction between the refined Mughal idiom and indigenous artistic traditions. Prominent centres of this regional development included Lucknow, Faizabad, Murshidabad, and Hyderabad. After the turn down of the Mughal Empire in the 18th century switched a major reallocation of artistic skills across the Indian subcontinent as well as in the United Province, now Uttar Pradesh specifically in Awadh Region.

The study examines how the migration of Mughal-trained artists to Awadh, particularly Lucknow and Faizabad (now Ayodhya), accelerated the transformation of courtly miniature traditions into regional idioms. With the rise of the Nawabs as key cultural patrons, Awadh emerged as a major artistic centre where Mughal, Persian, regional folk, and European elements merged. The study also suggests that Awadh painting should not be seen as a decline of Mughal miniature art, but as an aesthetic reconfiguration shaped by artistic shifts and evolving patronage and taste.

Keywords: *Mughal Miniature, Aesthetics, Awadh Painting, Artistic Migration, Patronage, Lucknow Culture, Regional Schools, Nawabi Art, Expression*

Rajput Paintings: A Re-appraisal

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Ananda Coomaraswamy, in his seminal publication of 1916, coined the term “Rajput Painting” to distinguish it from Mughal painting. Since then, several art historians have continued to either add to or contend his scholarship, but it has been impossible to ignore the stark difference that lies between Rajput and Mughal schools of painting.

This paper attempts to address the ways in which art historians have perceived Rajput painting, drawing out a literature review in order to trace the historiography of Indian painting to much before the Mughal advent. The second part of the paper is an attempt to associate myself with Coomaraswamy’s scholarship by teasing out the most important and often neglected aspect of shringara, so prevalent in Rajput paintings, as the distinctive marker that separates it from the Mughal school of painting. Coomaraswamy recognized and realized early on, that the rich Indian literature (religious and profane) inspired the pictorial tradition by supplying verses for paintings. Most of this literature abided by the alamkarashastra and was abounded with bhava and rasa, all of which hitherto unknown to the Mughal invaders, but innate to the Indian literary tradition. It becomes interesting then, to observe the craft of the painters at the Rajput courts, who attempt to visually express bhava and rasa that the verses contain. Several art historians have argued for the creativity of the Mughal painters in comparison to the Rajput court painters. However, I wish to contend this on the basis of pictorial analysis of some illustrated paintings from the courts of Rajasthan in order to demonstrate the freedom and agency enjoyed by the painters at Rajput courts in comparison to the tightly controlled Mughal painting atelier.

The methodological approach employed towards this end is through historiography and semiotics.

Keywords: *Rajput Painting, Semiotics, Historiography*

Ritualistic and Utilitarian Importance of the Bhil Paintings of Rajasthan

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Central University, Haryana

The tribal paintings, which look like abstract lines, have a ritualistic and utilitarian importance as it signifies the social customs in everyday practices, rituals, beliefs and mystical ideas. Tribals are simplistic, maintain harmonious relations with nature and live in relative isolation. The Bhils are the largest tribal community of Rajasthan. The word Bhil is derived from the Dravidian word ‘vil’, meaning the archer. Bhils are predominantly found in the Central-Western part of India, the “Adharkanch” region, which covers areas of present-day Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. Bhil painting is a male-dominated painting style. They use dots in their painting style, which are attached to several layers of symbolism. For example, each dot denotes a specific ancestor and deity, inspired by maize kernels. Even though it developed in the form of the ‘Zonal Geographic Tracking Coding System’, folklore, sun and moon, animals, and insects are all represented in this painting style. The common theme of Pithora Dev is widely drawn, taking the themes of the marriage procession of Baba Pithora and Pithora Devi. The significance of the Lakhara (the artist in local language), Badwa (priest and advisor) and Malga (storyteller) is described in this paper, and the similarities of these traditions in all the regions are compared. Thus, tribal paintings, which were the harbinger of the heritage and their culture, are studied in this research paper with their ritualistic, utilitarian, and every significant importance attached to them in a wider scope, with a modern aspect attached to the painting style prominently in Rajasthan.

Keywords: *Folk, Pithora, Painting, Symbols, Tribe*

Beyond the Brush: Deciphering the Lithic Lineage and Ritual 'Writing' of Pithora in Chota Udepur

Abhik Mukherjee

Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda

In the tribal landscape of Chota Udepur, Gujarat, the Pithora is often miscategorised by external observers as a mere folk painting or decorative mural. This paper challenges such reductionist labels by positioning the Pithora as a sophisticated system of ritual "writing" and a foundational device of devotion for the Rathwa community. Drawing on original fieldwork, this study documents extant rock art sites within the district and establishes ethnoarchaeological parallels between prehistoric petroglyphs and contemporary Pithora traditions.

The research argues that the Pithora is an ontological map rather than a visual ornament. Through ethnographic documentation of the ritual process, from the invocation of the Badwa (priest) to the precise execution by the Lakhara (writer), the paper illustrates how the mural functions as a living archive of Rathwa cosmology, social hierarchy, and ecological identity. By analysing specific symbols such as the stylised horses, the "dhaba", and the depiction of daily life, the study unveils a sacred semiotics that bridges the gap between the lithic expressions of the past and the vibrant mud walls of the present.

Central to this thesis is the community perspective: the Pithora is a "vow-fulfilment" mechanism, where the act of "writing" on the wall is a transformative spiritual labour. By shifting the scholarly gaze from "art history" to "ritual literacy", this paper seeks to correct the common misconception of Pithora as primitive art. Instead, it frames it as a resilient, regional "school" of visual communication that serves as a primary vessel for the Rathwa's collective memory and social cohesion. Hence, this paper seeks to reclaim the spiritual pride of the Rathwas and make us culturally sensitive to their religious life ways.

Keywords: *Pithora Ritual, Ethnoarchaeology, Rathwa Community, Chota Udepur, Ritual Literacy Rock Art Parallels*

P L E A C H I N D I A
F O U N D A T I O N

National Seminar

Schools of Art in India: Regional Variations in Sculptural & Painting Traditions



Mahajanaka Jataka | 6th-7th centuries CE | Mural | Ajanta Cave 1, Aurangabad, Maharashtra

S E S S I O N V I

Indian Sacred Art, Murals & Narrative Paintings

Chair: Dr. Rajesh Kumar Singh, Rishi Khanna Senior Fellow (Cave Temple Studies)

Sacred Stories in Colour: Janamsakhi Painting as Visual Narrative in Sikh Art

Dr Shivangi Naithani Devrani

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Janamsakhis, the hagiographic narratives of Guru Nanak (1469–1539), occupy a central place in Sikh literary and artistic traditions. Initially transmitted through oral storytelling within early Sikh communities, these narratives were gradually compiled into written manuscripts and later illustrated, giving rise to a distinctive visual tradition within Sikh art. Produced largely during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the Gurmukhi script, illustrated Janamsakhi manuscripts represent some of the earliest examples of Sikh painting. These works transform sacred narratives into visual compositions that communicate the life, teachings, and spiritual journeys of Guru Nanak.

The Janamsakhi tradition narrates episodes from the Guru's life, including his extensive travels known as Udasis, during which he engaged with followers of diverse religious traditions while advocating the principles of the oneness of God, equality, and social justice. Over time, these stories evolved from oral memory into textual accounts and eventually into visual narratives that conveyed theological and moral ideas to a wider audience. The paintings accompanying Janamsakhi manuscripts thus function not merely as illustrations but as interpretative visual narratives that shaped devotional imagination and collective memory within the Sikh community.

This paper examines Janamsakhi painting as an important component of Sikh visual culture and situates it within the broader framework of Indian miniature painting traditions. By analysing the narrative content, stylistic features, and artistic influences of these illustrated manuscripts, the study highlights the interaction between indigenous manuscript traditions and regional artistic styles, including Mughal and Pahari painting. The paper argues that Janamsakhi paintings represent a unique intersection of oral tradition, textual narrative, and visual expression, contributing significantly to the development of Sikh art and the broader landscape of Indian artistic traditions.

Keywords: *Janamsakhi Painting, Sikh Art, Guru Nanak, Visual Narrative, Sikh Manuscripts*

An Iconographic and Stylistic analysis of Galtaji Murals of Jaipur: A Case Study of ‘Balabai Conversing with Payohari Ji’ & ‘Sages of Galta’ Mural Panels

Agroneel Mandal

Visva-Bharati University

Galtaji Temple Complex is situated in the mountain ranges of the Aravali to the east of Jaipur. It is a religious site, belonging to the Ramanandi sect of Vaishnavism since the 16th century AD. Galtaji is one of the most important and oldest sites for Jaipur’s and Rajasthan’s artistic heritage, especially for its murals. The themes of these murals are on religious narratives, secular and diverse themes, along with intricate decorative patterns. Over a period of time, Galtaji has witnessed chronological developments in terms of its architecture, and stylistic changes in the frescoes starting from the 18th century to the mid-20th century.

This paper investigates the aesthetic profile and symbolic iconology of Galtaji, employing a narrative reconstruction to understand its historical development, which has never been done before. (A) Balabai conversing with Payohari Ji P. (Late 18th/Early 19th Century), painted on the outer wall of Gyan Gopal Ji Temple, & (B) The Sages of Galta. P. (19th century), painted inside the central cenotaph adjacent to the Zenana Kund. Through these two murals the present paper attempts to study the genesis of Galataji's importance as a historical and religious site and the stylistic features of these murals in the larger context of Jaipur School of frescoes.

This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach, primarily through on-site field documentation and direct observation of the murals. By integrating iconographic study i.e. utilizing photography, textual analysis, and expert interviews, and with a stylistic critique grounded in art history; the paper offers a deep dive into the specific visual and structural elements of Jaipur Frescoes.

By reconstructing these visual narratives and analyzing the Jaipur School of frescoes, this paper seeks to fill critical scholarly gaps and advocate for the preservation of these neglected historical treasures.

Keywords: *Galtaji Temple, Iconography, Heritage, Mural Narratives, Jaipur Frescoes*

Case Study of Murals from Lakshminarayana Temple of Bandhativare, Ratnagiri District, Maharashtra

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This article examines the murals discovered in the Lakshminarayana Temple located in Bandhativare village, Ratnagiri District, Maharashtra. Based on their stylistic features, these murals can be dated to the Maratha period and belong to the Maratha school of Art. Murals from this region are relatively rare, making these findings particularly significant. The paintings display regional variations in style and motifs, reflecting local traditions and environmental influences. They predominantly illustrate narratives drawn from epics and Puranic literature.

Keywords: *Ratnagiri, Konkan, Marathas, Murals, Wall Paintings*

Chitrakathi School of Performance Painting: Mirroring literary & religious texts of the Deccan

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Throughout Indian history, values and moral ethos of Indian culture have been propagated amongst the masses through various religious performances taking place in the temples, shrines, processions and jatras. These values are effectively transmitted via the agency of devotional songs, kirtanas, pravachanas, ritual dances and performances. One such practice of Chitrakathi paintings utilizes paintings drawn on paper, leather or wood to narrate the regional versions of diverse religious canons. Many medieval literary works are elaborately & colourfully depicted in the set of Chitrakathi paintings termed as Pothis. The medieval literary works, Chitrakathi paintings and associated performances together present regionally unique variations of the popular Epics, Puranas and religious texts.

The present paper investigates the genesis of Chitrakathi paintings which were once widely practiced and performed across the state of Maharashtra and beyond. This paper traces the art-historic journey and the characteristic artistic styles within this form of painting. The content and themes featured in the Chitrakathi paintings are explored, documented and discussed at length.

Additionally, the paper documents the present form of practice, associated ethnic communities, the notable painters and the modern trends witnessed related to this painting school. The paper aims to make a case for the wider historical presence of Chitrakathi painting tradition through the survey of presently scattered sets & specimens of Chitrakathi paintings across various museums and private collections in the world.

The paper claims that the Chitrakathi painting style and form share common roots with early medieval and medieval milieu of Dakkhani painting traditions (both, in mural and miniature) found in the Deccan cultural landscape.

Keywords: *Chitrakathi, epics, medieval marathi literature, folk*

Reused Sacred Forms: An Archaeological Study of Composite Jain Icons and Temple Context in Jain Temple Koge, Kolhapur

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This paper presents a field-based archaeological study of a ruined Jain temple, dated to the medieval period, at Koge village in Kolhapur district, Maharashtra, focusing on the phenomenon of composite iconography and the reuse of sculptural fragments within a living sacred context, material evidence, preserves a central seated Tirthankara flanked by attendant chamara-dharas. The object demonstrates the integration of diverse iconographic elements, conventionally associated with distinct symbolic traditions, into a unified representational form. The torso constitutes an independent sculptural unit, while the head and prabhavali belong to a separate slab, visibly reattached through later intervention.

The attendant figures further demonstrate stylistic inconsistencies from the central icon, suggesting their displacement from an original compositional context. The temple itself, currently in a ruinous condition with evidence of structural collapse, vegetation damage, and modern cement repairs, reflects a long history of material transformation and local intervention. Drawing upon the concept of the “continuation of sacred space,” the study suggests that the incorporation of multiple iconographic features does not disrupt the sacred character of the object. Instead it extends the visual elements across traditions and emerges as a common and recurring practice.

The Koge assemblage is part of something that is seen in other areas like the Deccan, especially Karnataka. This study shows that the way sculptures are put together in the koge is not a one time thing. It is actually part of a bigger tradition where old pieces are used to make new sacred things. The paper uses three frameworks to understand these changes including composite iconography, and it also considers traditional practices or non-canonical practice. This study fills a gap in Jain Art History. Existing research focused on traditional forms but ignored what happens to damaged or rebuilt statues by challenging the idea that Jain art has fixed and unchanging images.

Keywords: *Composite Iconography , Sacred space , Ritual continuity , Jain Iconography , Koge*

P L E A C H I N D I A
F O U N D A T I O N

National Seminar

Schools of Art in India: Regional Variations in Sculptural & Painting Traditions



Shiva and Parvati | 9th Century CE | Bronze | Pala, West Bengal

S E S S I O N V I I

Pala School: Patronage & Thangka Art

Chair: Dr. Chithra Madhavan, Art Historian, Writer

Beyond the Canon: Regionality and Stylistic Plurality in Pala Bronzes

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This paper investigates the evolution and diversification of metal sculptural traditions under the Pala dynasty in the eastern Indian subcontinent. This research analyses how a cohesive artistic language developed under dynastic patronage and later gave rise to multiple regional idioms, these idioms became the key production of centres such as Nalanda, Bodhgaya, Kurkihar, Varendra, Jhewra, and Chittagong. The main focus is to move beyond the monolithic understanding of Pala art; the study foregrounds regional variation as a critical lens for interpreting stylistic development.

The research situates Pala bronzes within a broader historical continuum, beginning with the influence of the Gupta classical idiom, which had established a formal balance, idealised physiognomy, and refined modelling. The period between the Gupta and Pala identifies a transitional phase following the decline of Gupta authority and the emergence of a new visual language. The Pala period marks a decisive moment in which this transformation took its shape. The paper applies a formalistic and comparative methodology to examine sculptural features such as bodily proportion, ornamentation, casting techniques, and iconographic detailing. It correlates these visual characteristics with the socio-political and religious frameworks that sustained artistic production, including monastic networks, royal patronage, and artisanal guilds. These institutions facilitated both the circulation of canonical forms and the emergence of localised expressions.

Furthermore, the study traces the diffusion of Pala stylistic elements beyond eastern India into the trans-Himalayan regions and parts of Southeast Asia, highlighting processes of adaptation and reinterpretation. By mapping these trajectories, this research argues that Pala bronze sculpture is not a fixed stylistic entity, which is always mistaken by idealising the Kurkihar bronzes, but a dynamic and pluralistic field of other regional languages and its production. This work will attempt to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of regionality, mobility, and aesthetic negotiation in Pala bronzes.

Keywords: *Pala Bronze, Regional Idioms, Kurkihar, Stylistic Transition, Eastern India*

The Thangka Painting and Its History in Bihar

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Thangka painting represents a sophisticated paradigm of Himalayan Buddhist iconography, originating in Tibet and proliferating through Bhutan, Nepal, and northern India. These scroll paintings, executed on textile substrates, function as indispensable liturgical instruments for meditative praxis and didactic instruction. This study examines the evolutionary trajectory of Thangka art as a reflection of the multifaceted cultural and religious exchanges facilitated by trans-Himalayan trade and pilgrimage networks. Thangka paintings, as they travelled across different regions, often adapted and blended with local artistic styles and cultural aesthetics. This fusion resulted in variations that reflected the unique traditions, religious influences, and artistic preferences of each area, enriching the overall diversity and evolution of Thangka art.

The production of Thangka is a highly disciplined process governed by orthodox iconometric treatises. This technical methodology involves the preparation of a lime-primed cotton canvas, followed by the application of a precise geometric grid to ensure the proportional integrity of divine figures. The utilisation of noble materials, including lapis lazuli, cinnabar, and gold, underscores the symbolic and metaphysical depth of the medium. Furthermore, the practice of mounting these works on silk brocade facilitates their portability, reinforcing their status as "mobile sanctums" within nomadic and monastic contexts.

Finally, this paper evaluates the pivotal role of the scholar Rahul Sankrityayan in the twentieth-century repatriation of this heritage to Bihar. By recovering an extensive corpus of manuscripts and Thangkas during his Tibetan expeditions, Sankrityayan sought to bridge the historical lacuna left by the decline of Buddhism in India's medieval heartland. His efforts, culminating in the significant collections housed within the Patna Museum, not only preserved critical artefacts of Buddhism but also re-established Bihar's ancestral connection to the broader Buddhist world, fostering a contemporary revival of scholarly and cultural interest in the region's Himalayan ties.

Keywords: *Thangka, Painting, Tibet, Rahul Sankrityayan*

The Dynamic Archiscape of Mallabhum: Temples and Patronage

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The present-day district of Bankura (West Bengal) was once the kingdom of Mallabhum. It is believed that the Malla dynasty was established in the 7th century CE by Adi Malla. However, the Malla rule reached its pinnacle with the 49th king of this dynasty, Bir Hambir (1565-1620). He was a follower of the Shakta religious practices but later converted to Vaishnavism under the influence of Srinivas Acharya, the strongest preacher of the neo-Vaishnavite philosophy of Chaitanya in Bengal. Further, on account of patronage from Bir Hambir and the subsequent rulers, Mallabhum became a very important regional center of Vaishnavism. Patronage concerning Vaishnavism came in the form of land grants, financial aid, and temple construction, which further cemented the process of institutionalization of the sect. The most visible marker of patronage was, of course, the numerous temples that were constructed while the Malla kings were in power. Of the constructed temples, the most significant and prominent ones are to be found within the city of Bishnupur, the capital of the Malla Kings.

Through this paper, an attempt will be made to examine the dynamic archiscape of Mallabhum, at the temple town of Bishnupur, in the background of disrupted but continued patronage that these temples received. It would further explore how these temples (representative examples), their designs, building materials, and façade decoration engage in a visual conversation with the devotee. The paper will also try to raise some critical questions about how this dynamism spills over into contemporary times by engaging with heritage and heritage management discourse, as well as the site's emergence as a symbol of cultural identity.

Keywords: *Archiscape, Mallabhum, Visual dynamism, Bengal Temples*

Reading Forts in Paint: A Visual Analysis of Military Architecture in Miniature Traditions

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This study examines the representation of fort architecture and military spatial systems in miniature paintings produced between the 12th and 17th centuries, a period marked by transformative shifts in warfare technologies, particularly the advent of gunpowder and cannon. Situating miniature paintings as visual repositories of architectural knowledge, the research investigates how these artworks function not merely as aesthetic objects but as forms of documentation, memory, and interpretation of built environments. By foregrounding the intersection of art and architecture, the study seeks to understand how evolving defensive strategies and construction techniques are encoded within pictorial traditions. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative visual analysis with comparative and interpretive frameworks. A curated corpus of digitized and scanned miniature paintings is systematically examined to identify recurring and divergent architectural features, including fort walls, bastions, gateways, ramparts, and spatial layouts. Stylistic analysis is employed to assess representational conventions, scale, perspective, and symbolic abstraction, while close visual reading enables the extraction of architectural details embedded within narrative or decorative compositions. The concept of the palimpsest is used as an analytical lens to trace layered representations, where successive artistic interventions reveal shifts in architectural understanding and depiction over time. By mapping visual patterns across temporal and regional contexts, the study reconstructs trajectories of change in military architecture as reflected in artistic production. It pays particular attention to how the introduction of artillery may have influenced the depiction of fortifications, including the transition from vertical defensive forms to more complex, bastioned systems. Ultimately, the research contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by positioning miniature paintings as critical sources for architectural history, offering insights into the evolution of fortifications that complement textual and archaeological evidence.

Keywords: *Miniature Paintings, Fort Architecture, Military Architecture, Visual Analysis, Architectural Representation*

Ragamala Miniature Paintings : A Penchant for Profound Indian Art Traditions

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Indian Miniature paintings have histories, themes, conventions; they are often known for the schools to which they belong or to regions, or even in many cases by the names of their patrons. In any case a miniature painting has its form, line and colour, and as already said, its themes and conventions. It communicates life, movement and energy. It can convey human emotion and passion and can even depict psychologies. Beginning as illustrations to religious texts, miniature painting went on to illustrate myths, legends and folk-lore, and paint even nature's seasons and ragas and raginis. That is to say, miniature painting, particularly in India has a vast range of expression. It has been used to paint battles, victories, defeats, escapes and flights; feasts and festivals, hunts and river-crossings, and even all of nature, including its trees, birds and animals.

The paper will employ both primary and secondary research. The qualitative research will draw on visual analysis, critical theory, and case studies of indigenous artistic practices as its foundation. The visual analysis and critical theory will analyse artwork as a form of cultural text, documenting Indian miniature painting with its wide territorial expansion, supposed to have begun in the 11th and continued as a genre till the 19th century. This study also falls within the time span of Indian medieval history. Painters in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Orissa, Bengal, Nepal and even Tibet and Punjab, Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and the Deccan, used this art form most creatively to give expression to their imaginative sensibilities.

Further, it should be re-iterated again and again that Indian miniature painting in general comprehends the cultural heritage of India over a significant, wide timeframe with geographical spread. Hence, this paper serves a profound insight, and a far-reaching penchant for Indian art which spans centuries.

Keywords: *Ragamala, miniature paintings, indigenous, medieval history*

Socio-Economic Impact of Trade Routes during Post-Gupta Inscriptions - A Critical Study

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This research proposal focuses on trade routes, transportation and socio-economic role of “Mandsaur” inscription of Gupta period in ancient India. The research will analyze the development of inland and foreign structures of trade, their economic-cultural impact and role of trade unions since the emergence of Indian civilization. The main research question is how trade routes and guild systems advanced Indian society towards economic unity, cultural exchange and urbanization. The primary objective is to study the historicity of trade routes, the diversity of the regions they connected and the nature of socio-economic life of the Gupta period from sources such as the Mandsaur inscription. The research will use historical-critical methodology and analysis of epigraphic sources, including epics, texts, sculptures, archaeological evidence and records. It is expected that the research will reveal the multi-faceted character of ancient Indian trade, routes and associations, which will add new dimensions to a deeper understanding of Indian economic history. Thus, this study will provide meaningful research innovations and policy perspectives to understand the historical significance of trade and Gupta associations of ancient India.

Trade was one of the great builders of the country's economic well-being and trade with distant countries was a feature of Indian economic life right from the days of the Indus Valley Civilization. All types of inland and foreign trade took place in ancient India. Traders had a respected position and important place in the national economy of the country. Trade is a natural consequence of industry as industrial products have to find markets for their disposal. With industrial progress there developed intensive inland and foreign trade and foreign trade also increased.

Keywords: *Trade, Gupta, post-Gupta, inscriptions, transport*

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