

Paintings: The Prismatic Palette of Rajasthan

By

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Abstract

The paintings of Rajasthan represent a vibrant expression of India's cultural heritage, reflecting the state's rich history, devotion, heroism, and aesthetics. Rooted in royal patronage and local traditions, Rajasthani paintings evolved into a sophisticated art form that bridges classical and folk creativity. This article explores the origin, development, and distinctive schools of Rajasthani painting—Mewar, Marwar, Hadoti, and Dhundhar—along with their sub-styles and themes. It also discusses folk painting traditions and museums preserving this legacy.

Keywords

Rajasthani painting, miniature art, Rajput art, Mewar school, Marwar school, Hadoti school, Dhundhar school, folk painting, royal patronage, traditional art of Rajasthan

Introduction

The art of painting in Rajasthan has a deep connection with the cultural and spiritual fabric of the region. These paintings flourished under royals who encouraged artists to depict varied themes. The miniature format, intricate detailing, and use of natural colors became hallmarks of this tradition.



Image 1: Painted Manuscript- Kalpsutra

The earliest scientific study of Rajasthani painting was conducted by **Ananda Coomaraswamy** in 1916 through his book “Rajput Paintings.” Scholars like O.C. Ganguly and E.B. Havell also used the term “Rajput Painting,” while later critics such as C. Sivaramamurti called it “Hindu Painting.” However, the Indian art historian **Rai Krishna Das** proposed the term “Rajasthani Painting” to describe its distinct regional identity—a name now widely accepted.

Ogh Niyukti Vriti and Das Vaikalik Sutra Churni are the oldest (1060 A.D.) surviving paintings of Rajasthan preserved at Jaisalmer museum.

Various schools of Rajasthani Painting

(a) Mewar School

The Mewar School of Painting originated in Udaipur and is among the oldest traditions of Rajasthani art. Its main sub-styles include **Udaipur, Nathdwara, Chavand, Devgarh, Shahpura and Sawar**. Shravak Pratikraman Sutra Churni was the first book painted in 1260 A.D., presently preserved in Boston. The paintings of this school are known for their bright colors such as red, green, and yellow, along with bold lines and strong expressions. The **Jain Kalpsutra, Rasikapriya and Gita Govinda**, series from Nathdwara showing Shrinathji, are

famous examples of this style. Text was written on top in black color against the yellow ground.



Image 2: Painting from Mewar school

(b) Marwar School

The Marwar School includes the regional styles of **Jodhpur, Bikaner, Kishangarh, Pali, and Nagaur**. These paintings show a Mughal influence, using softer colors, refined lines, and lyrical compositions. Common themes include court scenes, romantic episodes, and divine love, often focusing on Krishna and Radha. Artist families of Ustas and Mathernas from Bikaner dated and signed each of their paintings. The best-known example is **Bani Thani of Kishangarh**, often called the “**Mona Lisa of India**”, admired for its poetic beauty and idealized grace.



Image 3: Bani Thani - Kishangarh School

(c) Hadoti School

The Hadoti School, also known as the **Pashu-Pakshi** style, developed in **Bundi, Kota, and Jhalawar** and is noted for its lush landscapes, dramatic skies, and natural detailing. Artists of this school often painted hunting scenes, royal leisure activities, and monsoon moods, giving their work a lively and realistic quality. Well-known examples include *Raja with Falcon* and royal procession scenes from Bundi, which highlight the elegance and dynamism typical of the Hadoti tradition.



Image 4: Royal procession scenes from Bundi

(d) Dhundhar School

The Dhundhar School, centered in **Amber (Jaipur), Shekhawati, and Alwar**, is recognized for its fine line work, pink and gold tones, and delicate detailing. Many paintings from this region depict Jain Tirthankaras, royal portraits, and folk festivals, sensuous portraits from Alwar style, reflecting both religious and cultural themes. Notable examples include the colorful murals found on the Havelis of Shekhawati, which display the richness of local artistry.



Image 5: Wall paintings - Haveli of Shekhawati.

Folk and Traditional Paintings

Alongside various schools, Rajasthan also nurtured folk painting traditions rooted in village life and rituals. These forms use natural colors made from stones, flowers, and minerals.

Phad Paintings (Bhilwara): Scroll paintings narrating heroic tales like those of Pabuji and Devnarayan. These large, mural-like paintings on cloth were historically used by wandering priest-singers, known as Bhopas and Bhopis, as a visual aid during their nighttime musical and dramatic performances. The term "phad" means "fold," referring to how the scrolls are unrolled to be displayed.



Image 6: Phad Painting

Pichwai (Nathdwara): Large devotional paintings depicting Lord Krishna (Shrinathji), often hung in the temples.



Image 7: Pichwai Painting

Mandana (Kota and Bundi): Floor and wall paintings created by rural women for festivals and auspicious occasions.



Image 8: Mandana Painting

Kawad Paintings: Wooden panel storytelling paintings popular among traveling priests.



Image 9: Kawad Painting

These folk arts express the collective imagination of Rajasthan and continue to thrive as living traditions.

Techniques and Materials

Rajsthani paintings are traditionally made using handmade paper or cloth. Colors are extracted from minerals, vegetables, and precious stones—lapis lazuli for blue, cinnabar for red, and gold leaf for ornamentation. Brushes are made from squirrel hair for precision. The miniature scale, attention to texture, and emphasis on emotion make these works visually enchanting. Marked by expressive eyes, lyrical grace, rhythmic composition, and symbolic color use, themes often include Krishna's Raslila, royal hunts, Ragamala series, festivals, and seasons (Baramasa). The influence of literature and music is also evident, as many paintings visually interpret poetic works.

Developmental Institutions

Over centuries, several institutions have played a vital role in preserving and promoting Rajsthani painting. These include:

- Rajasthan Lalit Kala Academy (Jaipur)
- Western Regional Cultural Centre (Udaipur)
- Creative Artists Group (Jaipur)
- Tulika Kalakar Parishad (Udaipur)
- Progressive Artists Group (Udaipur)

Museums that house important Rajsthani painting collections include:

Pothikhana (Jaipur), Pustak Prakashan (Jodhpur), Jain Bhandar (Jaisalmer), Kota Museum, Alwar Museum, and Saraswati Bhandar (Udaipur). These repositories have safeguarded invaluable manuscripts and miniature paintings that narrate Rajasthan's glorious artistic journey.

Conclusion

The paintings of Rajasthan are not merely visual art; they are historical narratives that reflect devotion, bravery, romance, and refinement. Each brushstroke echoes the ethos of a civilization that celebrated both gods and heroes, kings and commoners, trees and animals. From the palatial murals of Bundi to the devotional Pichwais of Nathdwara, and from the miniature grace to the expressive modern works, Rajasthani art continues to stand as a living testament of the enduring spirit of Rajasthan.

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6. Pictures from various free sources.

About the Author

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