
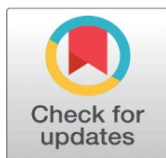


# AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF MANIPUR PAINTINGS IN PRE AND POST INDIA INDEPENDENCE

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## ABSTRACT

Painting is considered as one of the oldest art forms. Every civilization has its own history of painting. Painting deals with the pigment which is used to apply on the surface by using a binder. During the early period, man used to communicate through pictographic forms by depicting drawings and paintings on the wall surfaces. From the course of time drawing and painting have been a major part of transforming our human civilization. Manipur was one of the princely kingdoms in the earlier time. The people of this state were very talented and skillful. They used to practice art activities based on their livelihood and the official purposes of the royal court. Visual art has taken a very important role in the formation of Manipur tradition and culture. After the Vaishnavite religion introduced in Manipur, two types of painting styles were visible in the state before the India got independence. Formal art education was started lately after the British introduce in Manipur. The trend and development of Visual Art activities in the state were closely associated with the art development in the mainland states. The paper attempt to analyzed and narrate the art practice that happen in two decades of Manipur history i.e., Art trend before India Independent and post Indian Independent.

**Keywords:** Manuscript, Painting, Vaishnavite, Art Activities

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Painting is a two-dimensional form of art. It deals with the pigment which is used to be applying on the surface with a binder. It is considered as one of the oldest art forms in our human civilization. The evidence of drawings and paintings found in the cave shelter documented our past history and it is the source of our human progress. The preface to our human story opens with the earliest examples of wall painting, created by our first artistic ancestors' Paleolithic men. [Beckett \(1994\)](#) This artistic activity has performed in many different ways of life such as records of daily activities, decorating shelter places and used for communication. From the course of time drawing and painting have been a major part of transforming our human

civilization. When we look at Manipur civilization, it wouldn't be wrong that Manipur civilization was started since time immemorial. Manipur was one of the princely kingdoms in the earlier time. The origin of Manipur cannot be pinpointed to a single date however many scholars have interpreted with their different views. [Sadhana \(2017\)](#) has mentioned that Manipur state has two thousand years long history and there was a continuation of successive sovereign kings. Caves of Kangkhui (Ukhrul District), Songbu (Chandel District), Tharon (Tamenglong District) and Nongpok Keithelmanbi (Senapati District), Mongjam (Imphal District) and Wangu (Bishnupur District) shows Manipur was inhabited by pre-historic man. [Devi \(2013\)](#) The art of rock engraving, wood carving, metal casting, sculpting, and writing techniques were practiced since the early beginning of Manipur civilization. Visual art has taken a very important role in the formation of Manipur tradition and culture. For example, the seven colours denoted the clans of Meetei/ Meitei's peoples. This means that Manipur people were very much aware of visual art elements. The geometrical motive designs found in Satra, its forms, shapes, colours also show visual art elements are beautifully composed with creative ideas. The study of earlier Manipuri painting is a very difficult task, there were no such proper earlier painting found in the state. Most of the painting remain today were belongs to post Vishnavite period. The earlier paintings we can study only from the manuscript. The drawing and painting found in the manuscript observed that the art of painting has practiced in the earlier period. Changes are the nature of human beings. The change in visual art trend has been more popularly practiced after the Vishnavite religion came into the state.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present paper attempt to -

- 1) Study the art trend in Manipur.
- 2) Analysing the paintings.
- 3) Understand the contribution of artist and art promoters.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The Methodology adopted in this paper is mainly based on the conceptual framework of Manipur visual art trends. Data are collected from primary and secondary sources such as printed books, Photography, seminar papers, journals, and exhibition catalogues.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. ART TREND BEFORE INDIAN INDEPENDENT IN MANIPUR

When we study painting during before Indian Independence in Manipur, we can look back at two different decades i.e., Pre Vaishnavite period and Post Vaishnavite period. The painting available during the pre-Vaishnavite period could be studied from different manuscripts such as Subika Laisaba, Khutlou, Paphal Lambuba, etc. These illustrated manuscripts were created based on different aspects of Manipuri society like astrology, religion, tradition, customary laws, political, social, and economic affairs. [Devi \(2017\)](#) But the problem has been arising because of unavailable proper paintings found during this period. Only a few paintings can be studied from the manuscript. This may be the cause of burning 'Puya' (Holly's book of Meeteis'). Haobam Syamsunder Singh has stated that the painting that remains today belongs to around 19th Century A.D. Due to frequent happening of wars and

conflicts between the ethnic groups were the main reasons for deteriorating the paintings in Manipur. (Singh, seminar paper) pre-Vaishnavite paintings were mostly done with freehand lines and detail paintings. There was no sense of perspective in the painting. The paintings are more or less of ornate types. When various paintings are observed to the most possible simplification, the basic forms are geometric patterns, animal, bird figures, etc. The [Figure 1](#) shows the painting style of Pre Vaisnavite period. The material used for paintings is mostly done on Agarbak (Sandalwood), Meiteiche (local paper), and bamboo slice. Colours were mainly prepared from minerals, tree bark, flowers, etc. The black colour was prepared from lamp soot. Sometimes charcoal was mixed with the soot to make it darker. Painting styles were closely similar to China and Far East Asian painting.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1** Pre Vaisnavite-Manuscript Painting, Reference From 'Khutlou'.

**Source** Mutua Bahadur

After the Vaishnavite religion introduced in Manipur, the art of painting and sculpture were more popular than before. In the name of religion, the Hindu missionaries used to spread the Vaishnavite religion by showing different icons and painting images of gods and goddesses. Tombi Singh pointed out that during the reign of king Garibniwas (1709-1748) the Bhakti element in the religion ran high after the conversion of Meiteis into Vaishnavism. [Tombi \(1992\)](#) Houbam also stated that during the 14th century A.D. a group of some Buddhist and Hindu missionaries enter Manipur, and the Hindu religion starts fame in Meitei communities. They bring miniature paintings and idols of Hindu gods and goddesses. Because of this, a new trend of art practice has been started in the state. The painting of Bengal patchitra has introduced and popularly used by our local artist. They have geared up the paintings by using opaque watercolour technique. Apart from Bengal patchitra later on they used to follow the styles of Rajasthani and Mughal paintings. Ningthoujam Bhadra Singh was one of the pioneers who initiated the painting of Rajasthani and Mughal styles of painting to Manipur soil. This style of painting has been continued till before the outbreak of World War II. The [Figure 2](#), depicting the influence of Rajasthani painting styles in the state. The painting has been developed in terms of using perspective and use of opaque water colours. The depicted painting of gods

and goddesses were painted on paper or cloth. Bahadur (2003) God and goddess of Shiva, Ram, Seta, Parvati, Krishna, and Radha was the main subject of the paintings. These paintings were used to keep in the mandap, sangoi (opened gathering place) as a part of decoration.

Apart from painting, the art of stone engraving of Hindu mythological gods and goddesses were also very popular in the state. Such sculpted idols were used to keep around the temples. Further than, there was a great changed of architectural styles of temples too. A new trend of temple architectural style has also adopted in the state. The temples of Rama, Hanuman, Radha Krishna, Govindaji, Kali temple etc. were constructed in different architectural Hindu style. Singh (2012)

Figure 2



Figure 2 Influence of Rajasthani Painting ("Krishna with Gopies" Medium: Gouch, N. Badra Singh).  
Source Manipur State Museum

#### 4.2. POST INDEPENDENT ART TREND IN MANIPUR

There were many changes found in the visual art trend in Manipur after World War II. There was no formal art education in the earlier time. Artists used to paint according to their choices and interest in the subject matter. For the time being the popularity of western art spread to the Indian continent and dominating the traditional styles of paintings. This impact has reached to the Manipur state. The artists used to divert from the old traditional paintings and religious styles and following the western painting technique Figure 3. They have depicted the paintings by showing the sense of perspective, volumes, colours and composition. In around 1938-40 just before the war, a new style of art "Impressionism" was brought by Maharaj Kumar Priyobrata Singh (1911-2005) to the state. In the Manipur history this period can be considered as the turning point of modernism start in the state. (Singh, Bahadur) From that time the art trend of modern concept has reached to the heart of Manipuri artist. His painting "J.N. Hospital Room no.6", "Usha", "SunShine after rain" recalled us the works of France artist Claude Monet painting. M.K. Priyobrata Singh was a versatile person. He was not only a prince but also an artist, a politician, an educationist, an active social worker, a film maker etc.

Figure 3



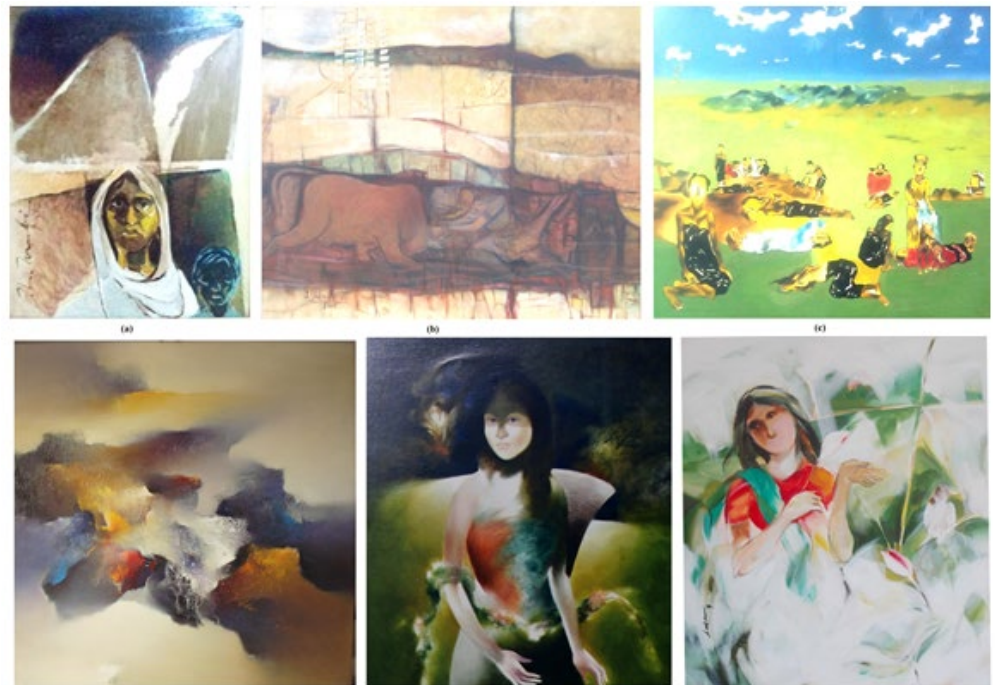
**Figure 3** Western Influence (“Jila darbar” Maharaj Chandrakriti of Manipur on Elephant in August 1974 on the way to Jila Durbar to Meet the Viceroy of India, Lord North Brook) by R.K. Yumjaosana. Source Manipur State Museum

In 1949, a dedicated artist Hanjabam Syamo Sharma (1917-1979) established a new art school called ‘Imphal Art School’. He sacrificed his whole life for establishing and becoming an art school. Before establishing this school, he started art schooling at many places of Imphal area with rented system. He gathered some enthusiastic students sitting on the ground and taught art lessons in Western Anatomy and perspective. From time to time this school was shifted to many places because of his unavailability to pay rent and at the same time, he was unable to own a piece of his own. Tombi (1992) At the beginning, many of the students were coming to learn fine arts as a part-timer. Later on, some of the young energetic artists were coming out to learn the art trend under Guru Syamo Sharma. There was only a diploma course at that time. Due to the lack of infrastructure in the art school, some of the students went to other states for studying higher knowledge of Visual art. From this period a new art trend of “contemporary art” has reached in the state and start practicing by our young artists. Thoidingjam has mentioned that the reason of coming contemporary art is that beyond the conventional and traditional styles of art, artists were searching for new ideas, concept and techniques for producing a unique meaningful piece of art. Tombi (n.d.)

In India, the foundation of Progressive Artist group such as Bombay Progressive Artist Group (1947), Calcutta Progressive Artist Group (1943), Bombay Group (active in 1957-62), and Delhi Silpi Chakra (1949) has started practicing the new global trend of modern art movement. Mago (2001) The art institutions have also followed the modern art trend. This changing trend of art practice has also impacted the Manipuri artist. Students those who were studied in other states, they bring contemporary styles of art to Manipur. Some of the vanguard artists brought contemporary tests to the state namely Th. Tombi Singh (National Awardee-1988), Late L. Shamu Singh, S. Joychandra Sharma, Y. Ibochaoba Singh, Ch. Premananda Roy, Y. Nabachandra singh, Th. Debendra Singh, etc. The above senior artists have contributed with ample dedication towards the contemporary art movement in Manipur. Guru Th. Tombi Singh (1936-) was a genius and visionary artist. He was

the disciple of H. Syamo Sharma and once a former principle of Imphal Art College. The art of cubism has fully emerged him and give the idea of modernism to the young students and artist. He was the first recipient of National Award given by the Lalit Kala Akademi. Another artist late Guru L. Shamu Singh (1947-2020) was an outstanding contemporary artist. He was not only an artist but also a dedicated teacher. He spent his life serving in the central school from 1965 to 1985. In his career he had a chance to meet with Indian reknown contemporary artist K.G. Subramanyan, K.K. Heber and Ms. Jaya Appasami. After meeting with these artists, his later paintings have visible so many changes in terms of clours, figures, drawing, composition etc. Most of his painting used with cool colours. The unique style of Shamu painting was to use minimum colours and resemble with heavy lines. Another artist Guru Ibochouba Yendrebam (1951-) was a multi-talented dedicated artist. He was not only a painter but also was a print maker. He is a gentle and soft-spoken person. He has initiated Graphic art subject in the Art College. Becoming as a figurative painter he used to depict the social theme. Many of his painting we can see the dramatic scenes with distorted figures. Figure 4 c “Kuki Victim” is a painting base on communal conflict happens between Naga insurgency group and Kuki civilian peoples during 1992. This incident resulted the hundreds of lives were demised; many villages were destructed and expatriate. This kind of social problems he has selected and visually narrated in the form of paintings. So, the journey of visual arts has continuously developed generation by generation. Now day artists were looking forward to the global art trend. Printed media like art Magazines, Books, Journals, and social media has also been assisting for promoting visual art practice in the state.

**Figure 4**



**Figure 4** Contemporary Paintings (a) “Mother & Child”, Oil on Canvas by Th. Tombi Singh, (b) “Khambana Kao Phaba”, Oil on Canvas by Th. Samu Singh, (c) “Kuki Victim”, Oil on Canvas by Y. Ibochoaba Singh. (d) “Hillscape”, Oil on Canvas by Th. Devendra Singh, (e) “Hilly Women”, Oil on Canvas by Y. Gunindro Singh, (f) “Bonding”, Acrylic on Canvas by Ch. Lalit Singh.

**Source** Personal collection

### 4.3. GROWTH OF ART PROMOTERS

Manipur State Kala Akademi is one of the Akademi, established for the promotion and welfare of the artist. It was established in 1972. It is a composite version of the three National Akademis at New Delhi viz. Sangeet Natak, Sahitya and Lalit Kala Akademi. The Akademi has a special interest and support for promoting visual artists on National and international platforms. From time to time the Akademi has organized various art activities like seminars, art workshops, Annual Art Exhibition, Group Art Exhibitions, Mobile Art Exhibitions, and memorial lecturers. Intended for the progress of art activities, the Akademi has also organized an interaction program with eminent artists, art critics, and art historians. The Akademi also provides an opportunity to expose the artist's talents, concepts, and creative ideas.

Art Society Manipur is one of the active organizations specially established for the welfare and promotion of the artist. This organization has focused not only visual art field but also cover all the other art forms. It was established in 1972. Guru Th. Tombi Singh has initiated for establishing and regulating the works and programs of the society. 'Neo-Gen' is another young organization established for generating the visual artists. This organization provides a good studio facility for graphic artists. R&V foundation also boosts the young artists and gives hope for the international concept through organizing art fairs, art collections and selling artworks in different countries.

### 5. CONCLUSION

Manipur is a land of many different ethnic groups. The people residing in the state have their own identity and culture. From time immemorial the different communities living in the state have practiced various art activities such as embroidery, crafting, dyeing, writing, engraving, etc. People are creative in thinking and outlook. Visual Art has taken a major part for making a comprehensive Manipur society. The writing of the manuscript Puya (ancient book) and miniature paintings shows evidence of visual art practice in the early period. Our early scholars were recorded such miniature painting by depicting traditional believes and their daily experiences. After the Vishnavism reached in the state, the development of visual art has tremendously changed in terms of subject matters, uses of materials and techniques. Both the earlier and Hindu influence paintings we can see in before Indian Independence. The artist of the period had wholeheartedly contributed toward the progress of visual art in the state. We should remember the contribution of our great pioneers N. Bhadra Singh, M.K. Priyobrata Singh and Guru H. Shyamo Sharma. The later artist guru Th. Tombi Singh, Y. Ibochouba Singh, L. Shamu Singh and other artist were also taking a major role for transforming the progress and development of visual art in the state. After India independence, the artists were searching for new thought, ideas and concept towards global trend. From time to time the form of painting has been changed toward modernism. In present contemporary art trend, the artist also practiced the traditional styles of painting in modern concept. The art promoters also take a very important role for promoting the visual art in the state. They have organized various art activities such as workshop, exhibitions, seminars, and conferences in national and international level. The evidence of such art activities shows that the visual art practice has been developing continuously in Manipur.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

None.

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