



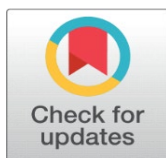
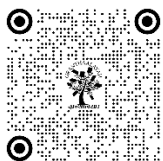


STUDY OF PRESENT-DAY INDIAN MINIATURE TRADITION: THROUGH THE PAINTINGS OF CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS VIRENDRA BANNU AND WASWO X. WASWO

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ABSTRACT

Looking at the art history, we see that art has evolved through the ages. A significant development can be seen in Indian miniature art tradition too. It is perceived that the foundation principles of miniature art remains the same however, the changes occurred in the stylistic creation and presentation of the composition. There is no way that the fundamentals and intrinsic meaning has been disappeared with course of time.

This paper aims at studying the various aspects of present-day Indian Miniature Tradition through an analysis of the miniature paintings of contemporary artists Virendra Bannu and Waswo X. Waswo. Socio-political, cultural, and economic factors are measured to determine the evolution and to understand its significance in defining the contemporary miniature art. This study will also unfold how traditional methods have been kept alive throughout the generations in course of time in spite of tremendous advances of the modern world. Practicing artist's interview and some paintings are considered in the paper to come to a conclusion.

Received 15 May 2023

Accepted 08 September 2023

Published 13 September 2023

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DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2SE.2023.498](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2SE.2023.498)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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Keywords: Miniature Painting, Material, Technique, Contemporary, Waswo X. Waswo, Virendra Bannu



1. INTRODUCTION

The origin of Indian Miniature painting traces to Buddhist manuscripts of Palas in eastern part of India during 8th -11th century A.D. In process, the western part chiefly Gujarat and Rajasthan in early 11th century practiced Jain manuscript paintings. These manuscripts had the religious theme predominate and were illustrated on dried palm leaves or cloth. In addition to the trend of Indian miniature

painting tradition, late 16th and early 17th century Rajasthani painting showed a certain degree of change representing diversified subjects such as episodes from Ramayana and Mahabharata, the life of Lord Krishna, flora and fauna, landscapes, royal portraits, courtly depictions, hunting scenes and many more Cummins (2006). With the advent of Mughals, variation occurred in the characteristic features, subject matter, style and materials. These changes were subjected to the liking of the patron, ruling class, religion followed and economic status. The cultural amalgam of Rajput kingdom and Mughal emperors brought significant evolution and resulted in the creation of some fine manuscript paintings. Some of the examples of development are creation of more intricate ornamented borders called as *hashiya*, paintings drifting from religious theme predominate to glorifying emperors' aura, establishment of art workshops as *karkhanas* where number of painters work under a roof as per their expertise. In addition, inclusions of migrating birds, exquisite animals, processional scenes, symbolic use of colors were featured in miniature painting. The use of Wasali paper instead of palm leaves noticed during the centuries. The move away from *tada patra* or palm leaf to paper brought more space and flexibility to the artist to paint with ease and utmost details. The use of gold and silver to add brilliance to the portraits of rulers brings out the concept of dominance which was earlier limited to gods and goddesses Sharma (1979). All the manuscripts paintings evolved with time throw light on the culture, tradition and practices of the past. It is visible that the changes occurred time to time keeping its fundamental meaning intact. In present time, artists like Virendra Bannu and Waswo X. Waswo are practicing years old miniature painting tradition. These artists hail from different origin however their approach to miniature practice is alike. Both have been subjected to use traditional method of Indian miniature painting despite the changes that have occurred during the modern era. Their works are analyzed to study the contemporary scenario of long practiced Indian Miniature Tradition.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study will seek to explain how Miniature art has evolved and played vital role in larger artistic world, as well as how it has developed while still adhering to the essential ideas that define it.

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

It is an effort to focus the revival of miniature art in the contemporary creative arena. This research is significant to preserve and to put forward the distinctive form of years old miniature art, to ascertain the importance of that art, and to trace its development up to the future generation.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study based upon the primary sources where the researcher has interviewed the artist to know about the miniature paintings and the style of working. The secondary sources used are books and articles.

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The book Cummins (2006) has specified details about the old tradition of miniature art. The origin, categories, technique, materials, process, and details of various miniature schools are well described for an extensive understanding about the subject.

In the book [Sharma \(1979\)](#) there is chronological description about the Indian miniatures which aided to get in touch with the developments and how the evolution occurred. Further, the study of some paintings in the book also helped to unfold the aesthetics of miniature paintings.

In the article [Bannu \(2015\)](#), there is vital information about the miniature practicing artist Virendra Bannu. The entire paintings listed explain the style of the artist and his idea of creation.

The article [Bhuyan \(2022\)](#) based on the artist Waswo X. Waswo. The observation of the excursionist as the artist explained well along with the details about the artist's working style which helped to understand his paintings mentioned in this paper.

In [Waswo X. Waswo \(n.d.\)](#), the entire works and the perspective of the artist Waswo X. Waswo are mentioned. The works showcased provided greater vision about the elements, subject matter and motifs used in his miniature paintings.

6. VIRENDRA BANNU PRACTICING MINIATURE ART

Artist Virendra Bannu, a seventh-generation miniature artist resides in Jaipur city, Rajasthan. As per the earlier tradition of learning *kala* through *guru shishya parampara*, he underwent training under his father Bannu Ji who was a trained well known miniature artist from India. Born in the year 1965, Virendra Bannu received BFA and MFA degrees in painting to get hands on experience of the contemporary art forms [Bannu \(2015\)](#). His paintings are reflection of traditional skills and present-day knowledge which favored a significant contribution to the development of Indian miniature painting.

7. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SOME PAINTINGS OF THE ARTIST

Figure 1

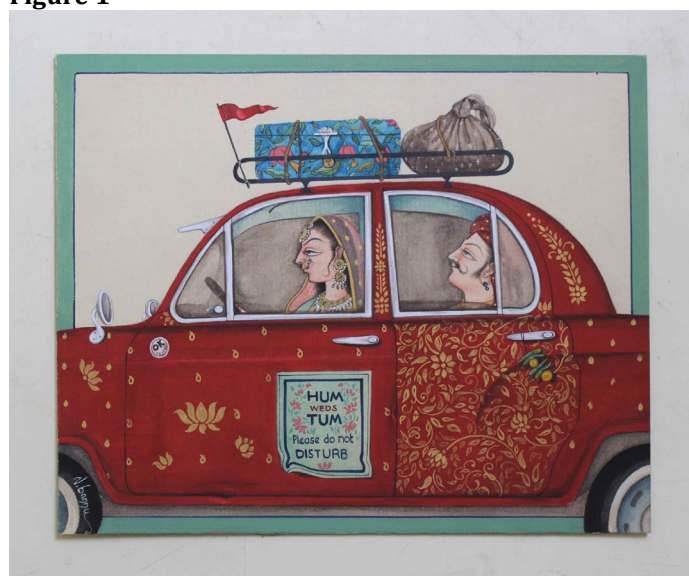


Figure 1 My Car, Water and Natural Color on Wasli Paper, Virendra Bannu.

Source Bannu, Virendra. "My Car". Private Collection, Photograph Taken by the Researcher, 17 Oct 2022

Virendra's painting ([Figure 1](#)) 'My Car' has been portrayed in miniature style and in context to Rajasthani style painting. The nayika dressed in traditional

transparent *odhani* clad with kundan jewelry shown driving the car whereas Nayak in *pagadi* seated at the back shown calm and relaxed. The *potli*, *sanduk* at the carrier, poster, flag, and ok tag on new car all symbolize Indian wedding custom of giving gifts to the couple. Looking at the painting, it is observed that the detailing of each element in the composition, sharp features and side profile of the human figures, female having long hair with a hair curl near ear, elaborate and delicate brushwork, use of gold, natural colors, and bright colors like red and yellow with flat background, addition of shading with an emphasis on naturalism are entirely made resembling an ancient Indian miniature style. Also, floral motifs especially lotuses painted on the car symbolize success and prosperity in life. This way artist Virendra remain intact with the core fundamental principle of miniatures of presenting ideas through symbols. As per the interview, it is stated by the artist that the surface on which the painting executed is wasli paper which is typically processed and used during the miniature era was passed on to the artist by his ancestors (Bannu, Introduction of the artist and his paintings). Even the knowledge of processing colors made from natural sources passed on to him from his father and forefather. Further, borders remained an identity of miniature paintings but breaking it to extend the car is the artist's own style of creativity. The main concept of the painting is to portray the status of women in 21st century and how they are the leaders of their life and also been able to support others. This very feature of illustrating elements in old Indian miniature traditional style and reflecting modern thought remained an identity of the artist Virendra Bannu.

Figure 2



Figure 2 हमारा भारतवर्ष, Water and Natural Color on Wasli Paper, Virendra Bannu

Source Bannu, Virendra. "हमारा भारतवर्ष". Private Collection, Photograph Taken by the Researcher, 17 Oct 2022

In the Virendra's painting (Figure 2) 'हमारा भारतवर्ष', the pattern of sky, rendering of banana and mango trees, creating scooter in the foreground, wall and trees in the middle and sky having clouds in the background gives an outlook of Indian miniature style of painting. Furthermore, the idea of border but extending the composition beyond the border is artist's style which can be seen often in his works. Observing closely, it is seen that the signatures with the title and year written

on the top is also one of the features associated to old miniatures of India. On the other hand, the idea is not to represent any mythological or religious theme as seen in earlier miniatures but to highlight the dirtiness of Indian's public spaces. It is specified by the artist in an interview that while doing BFA and MFA courses, he learnt the way how art serves didactic purpose during medieval era in Byzantine and Gothic art periods. This way Virendra Bannu used the very concept of educating people through his painting. Further, the torn poster, no parking sign, tag lines and *paan* stains on wall all to give message to the society to keep their surroundings clean and not to park in no parking zone.

8. MINIATURE ART THROUGH THE VISION OF WASWO X. WASWO

Waswo X. Waswo, an artist and photographer who was born in the year 1953 in U.S.A. The artist explored India for over twenty years and finally settled in Udaipur city of Rajasthan. During his stay, he got fascinated by Indian miniature style and thereafter established *Karkhana Bhuyan* (2022), an art atelier in the beautiful hills of Udaipur. The artist took inspiration from Mughal concept of developing an area specific for *kala* where number of artists can work together respective of their expertise. Likewise, Waswo works with miniature artist R. Vijay to portray his ideas in series of autobiographical miniature paintings. This concept of a foreigner experience portrayed in Indian miniature tradition is a distinctive art style made a significant contribution to the development of Indian miniature painting.

9. EVALUATING THE PERCEPTION BEHIND THE PAINTINGS

Figure 3

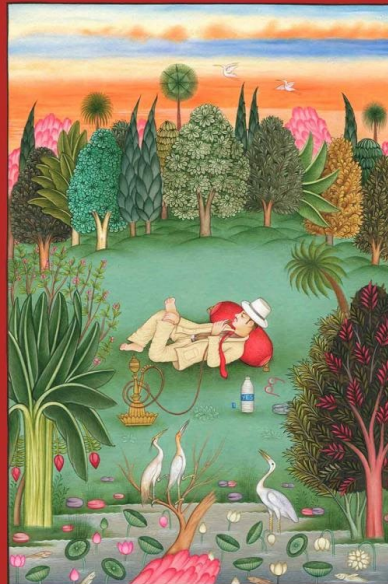


Figure 3 From the Series 'A Dream in Bundi', Wasli Paper, Waswo X.Waswo

Source Waswo X. Waswo (n.d.). WasWo X. WasWo Artist Website. Copyright © 2015 Waswo X. Waswo. All Rights Reserved. [https://waswoxwaswo.com/miniatures-gallery.php?galleryid=15#prettyPhoto\[artwork\]/6/](https://waswoxwaswo.com/miniatures-gallery.php?galleryid=15#prettyPhoto[artwork]/6/)

Waswo's painting (Figure 3) has been represented in Bundi style of Rajasthani miniature painting. Depiction of varied vegetation like banana tree, fan shaped tree, mango tree having dense branches and trees having long twirling lines accentuates the ornamentation as seen in the Bundi school of miniature painting. Further, dramatic sky, water with lotuses, mountains and cranes are the elements which characterize Bundi style of painting. The pink mountain ranges in the background and in the foreground along with the addition of different patterned trees are representation of Waswo's creativity added to revive old style of Indian miniature painting tradition. Like Lord Krishna often depicted playing flute surrounded with cows near Yamuna River in miniature paintings, here Waswo trying to create similar representation by depicting himself smoking *hookah* near water body having birds and flowers rejoicing nature. Here, artist Waswo is the centre of attraction in the painting alike to Krishna in Indian miniature paintings.

Figure 4

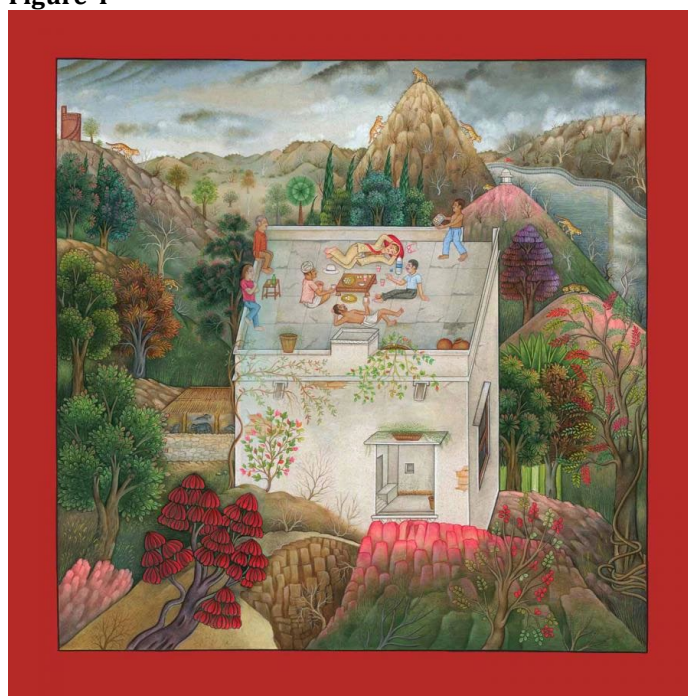


Figure 4 From the Series 'A Dream in Bundi', Wasli Paper, Waswo X. Waswo

Source Waswo, W. X. (n.d.-b). WasWo X. WasWo Artist Website. Copyright © 2015 Waswo X. Waswo. All Rights Reserved. [https://waswoxwaswo.com/miniatures-gallery.php?galleryid=15#prettyPhoto\[artwork\]/0/](https://waswoxwaswo.com/miniatures-gallery.php?galleryid=15#prettyPhoto[artwork]/0/)

Another miniature painting of Waswo X. Waswo is from the series 'A Dream in Bundi' (Figure 4). Depiction of architectural elements like forts, royal palaces, court scenes and many more seen in Mughal, Rajasthani Waswo X. Waswo (n.d.) and Pahari miniature paintings. In lieu of previous tradition, artist Waswo has depicted a contemporary concrete house in the midst of lush green vegetation. Artist Waswo as dressed in his identical attire having coat pants, red tie, glasses, and hat shown relaxing and enjoying feast with his friends and fellow mates on roof which gives an idea of earlier miniatures where royals shown enjoying performing activities like hunting, a forest trail, outdoor feasts in palaces, processional scenes and so on. It can be seen here too that the compositional format and intricate detailing to each component including the red bold border are typical of earlier miniature tradition.

In addition, cheetah strolling on the hills, distinctive forms of the trees, diversified color palette like tint of pink for mountains, purple for trees displays artist's style of adding aesthetics to the painting.

10. CONCLUSION

The paintings of the artists Virendra Bannu and Waswo X. Waswo are true glimpse of Indian miniature art. Both the artists have their own distinctive style of representation. Virendra Bannu preferred subjects from the present-day scenario with a purpose of giving message to the spectators. His style of illustrating elements, compositional format, and handling of materials remain intact of years old miniature tradition with an array of newer possibilities. The paintings of Waswo made to apprehend natural beauty with an addition of portraying himself as the centre of attraction. The use of wasli paper, intricate details, fine brushwork, compositional frame, treatment of colors, and illustration of borders justifies the concept of ancient miniature style of painting. His paintings give an idea of globalization of miniature art practices in India and abroad. Further, the paintings of both the artist act as a link to understand art traditions of the past, also throw light on the new ways of doing it.



Studio of the Artist, Photograph Clicked by the Reasearcher ([Bannu, V. Interview of Artist, 2022, Oct 17](#))



Reasearcher with the Artist Virendra Bannu in Hawa Mahal, Jaipur ([Bannu, V. Interview of Artist, 2022, Oct 17](#))

J.J- When did you start doing miniature painting?

V.B- I was interested in painting as a child when I use to see my father and forefathers were doing paintings for the royal family of Jaipur. I am the seventh generation miniature artist living in the 'Mussavviron Ki Gali' carrying forward the legacy of miniature paintings. Earlier it this form of art transferred through *guru shishya parampara* but I did my BFA and MFA degrees in Painting both to revive this old tradition which is inherited in me. With the knowledge of contemporary techniques and materials I could evolve my artistic miniature journey and put forward for future generation.

J.J- How did the idea of creating miniature painting with different perspective come about?

V.B- When I was doing my degree course in fine arts, I studied didactic purpose of the artworks. This inflicted my mind to give message to the society through my miniature works. Though the style is all same but the subject I portrayed is all cotemporary related to the recent time. This can be seen in my painting titled 'हमारा भारतवर्ष' where I am trying to take viewers' attention towards the cleanliness and not to litter things around.

J.J- What is your say on the evolution of miniature art tradition?

V.B- The miniatures have evolved over time. It changed slowly and methodically. I am doing is a little effort to it. Like my borders are going inside the painted area and also my painting subjects have changed from earlier portrayal of Hindu deities to more present-day themes like women empowerment and hygiene. My miniature paintings are my vision to what's going in the society and what I see around. Miniature is never a dying art but evolving with time.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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