



Arts

A LIVING TEMPLE - (PHAD PAINTING IN RAJASTHAN)

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Abstract

I consider Phad Painting as a valuable pilgrimage of Rajasthan. Phad painting (Mewar Style of painting) or Phad is a style religious scroll painting and folk painting, practiced in Rajasthan state of India. This is a unique scroll making folk art; this style of painting is traditionally done on a long piece of cloth or canvas, known as phad. It is synonymous with the Bhopa community of the state.

These are beautiful specimen of the Rajasthani cloth paintings. The narratives of the folk deities of Rajasthan, mostly of Pabuji and Devnarayan- who are worshipped as the incarnation of lord Vishnu & Laxman. Each hero-god has a different performer-priest or Bhopa. The repertoire of the bhopas consists of epics of some of the popular local hero-gods such as Pabuji, Devji, Tejaji, Gogaji, Ramdevji. The Phad also depict the lives of Ramdev Ji, Rama, Krishna, Budhha & Mahaveera. The iconography of these forms has evolved in a distinctive way.

Shahpura in Bhilwara district of Rajasthan are widely known as the traditional artists of this folk art-form for the last two centuries. Presently, Shree Lal Joshi, Nand Kishor Joshi, Prakash Joshi and Shanti Lal Joshi are the most noted artists of the phad painting, who are known for their innovations and creativity. Noted examples of this art are Devnarayan Ki Phad and Pabuji Ki Phad.

Keywords: Living Temple; Phad Painting.

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1. Introduction

All Phads, no matter which hero-god they present, have certainly similarities. The Bhopas, the priest-singers traditionally carry the painted phads along with them and use these as the mobile temples of the folk deities. Traditionally the phads are painted with vegetable colors. These have their own styles and patterns and are very popular due to their vibrant colors and historic themes. The Phad of God Devnarayan is largest among the popular Pars in Rajasthan. The painted area of God Devnarayan Ki Phad is 170 square feet (i.e. 34' x 5'). [3] Some other Pars are also prevalent in Rajasthan, but being of recent origin they are not classical in composition. Another famous Par painting is Pabuji Ki Phad. Pabuji Ki Phad is painted on a 15 x 5 ft. canvas. [3] Other famous

heroes of Phad paintings are Gogaji, Prithviraj Chauhan, Amar Singh Rathore etc. [2] On canvas miniscule scenes are either painted or sewn. The purpose of the painting is to depict a tale using images like regular comics.

These paintings have the mammoth task of representing a complex and a full blown folk epic narrative, which it achieves through a very specific style of representation, filled with figures & pictorial incidents, these paintings form a kind of dramatic backdrop to epic story telling performances.

Since they depict the different episodes, these paintings are customarily opened or unrolled only after sundown, in conjunction with the all night performance. This could be one reason for these paintings to be called Phad. Which means folds in Rajasthani dialect. The word Phad is possibly derived from Sanskrit word patt. The painters who traditionally engage themselves in the profession of Phad painting are known as Phad painter.



2. History of Phad Paintings

Phad scrolls date back approximately to thousand hundred years. It is believed to have been first commissioned by Chochu Bhat, a devotee of Lord Devnarayana and chronological mentor of Devnarayan's clan. Devnarayan was a medieval hero venerated as a folk-deity. He is worshipped as an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. According to the legend, he was incarnated in year of 968 (911 AD) of Vikram Era (Hindu calendar) as the son of Gurjar warrior Sawai Bhoj Bagaravat and his wife Sadu Maata Gurjari.

Pabuji is also worshipped as a folk-deity. He lived in 14th century in a remote village known as Kolu, near Jodhpur, in Rajasthan. The Phad represents his divine character as an incarnation of Laxmana (brother of the Rama of the Ramayana Hindu epic story)

History of Phad Painters

The professional Phads painters called Chitera and are known by the clan name 'Joshi' of the Chipa caste. Joshi is derive from "JYOTSHI" Brahmin Horoscope/Calendar predictor. Earlier Joshi Phad artists were engaged in horoscope/Calendar printing for "Jyotshi" or "Joshi" Brahmins but later they adopted "Jyotshi" profession and "Joshi" as a surname.

In 10th century Chochu Bhat commissioned Joshi Phad Painter to make Phad painting on Devnarayan's whole life. After seeing that artwork, Devnarayan privileged "Joshi" caste to make Phad paintings and since then "Joshi" are doing Phad painting.

Joshi is consider themselves belong from bharatpur, near Bhilwara city in Rajasthan and in 16th century they migrated to Shahpura. At the end of 19th century some Phad artists, moved from Shahpura to Bhilwara and they established a new seat for Phad Artists.

Shree Lal Joshi, Pradeep Mukherjee and Nand Kishor Joshi, Shanti Lal Joshi are the most noted artists of the Phad painting, who are known for their innovations and creativity. Prakash Joshi & Mukut Joshi are successfully following their lineage.

Though the icons created on these phads are logically arranged, the task of reading them is rather complex. Bhopas carefully narrate the story pictured on the phad, usually reciting it in the Maand style of singing.

Whether it is Devnarayan Phad or Pabuji ki Phad, religious association of the art is something no one can doubt. There is even a decommissioning ritual of Phad that is performed with as much sanctity as what would be due to a deity's idol. When the Phad wears out, it is properly immersed in the holy waters of Ganges or Pushkar Lake. The process is called Tandakarna, which literally means cooling out the divine powers.

When it comes to painting or sewing phads, the process these traditional artists use to create a phad is completely organic. From the canvas, made of Khadi fabric, to the paint colors, made from the extracts of vegetables, everything that goes into the making of this art is eco-friendly. Indeed, the art is quite distinct, and well-worth of reverence it possesses.

The Bhopa, belonging to the nomadic Rabari tribe, is a singer-performer who traditionally carries painted Phads— horizontal scrolls of hand painted images of local deities—and uses them as mobile temples of folk deities. Drawing from a rich repository of folklore, he, along with his wife the Bhopi, brings the Phad alive—enacting the scene depicted in it while playing a stringed instrument.

Says Pragati Agarwal, Founder, Art Tree and curator: “Phad is a traditional art form more than 700 years old from the Bhilwara/Shahpura region of Rajasthan, known not only for its vibrant colours, but also the fact that it is accompanied by an oral tradition of rendering gatha (folklore). This rendition is performed by Bhopa and Bhopi—priest and his wife from the Rabari tribe. The accompanying instrument is a two string ‘Ravanhatta’. The singing is about the gods, about the heroics of either the local deity Pabuji or Devnarayanji revered by the Gujjar community of camel herders. The Phads, painted like horizontal scrolls with natural colours, also portray folklores, scenes from the Ramayana, and other mythological narratives.

Technique - “Creating a Phad is an act of devotion even as it is an art form,” says Kalyan Joshi of the famed Joshi family that masters the art. “We commence our work with a prayer. Hand woven cloth is soaked overnight so that the threads get thicker. It is then starched, burnished for a smooth and shiny surface and then the Phad painter draws the entire narrative on this canvas. The figures are rounded, wear traditional attire and headgear and bright colours are used to fill them in. The colours are painstakingly extracted from natural sources—stones, flowers, herbs,” he adds.

Traditionally, the Bhopas commission the Joshis to make a Phad for them with which they travel and perform. They are mostly called upon to perform in a community if the animals become ill or die.

The Phad is unique in the manner it is formatted and made. There is a set pattern about how the characters are placed and the colour scheme. Every available inch of the canvas is crowded with figures. Another highlight is the flat construction of the pictorial space. While the figures are harmoniously distributed all over the area, the scale of figure depends on the social status of the character they represent and the roles they play in the story.

Another interesting feature is that the figures in the paintings do not face the audience; rather, they face each other. The illustrations are colour-coded—orange for limbs or torso of figures, yellow for ornaments and general clothing and designs, green for trees and vegetation, brown for architectural structures, red for royal clothing and flags and blue for water and curtains. An outline of the painting is drawn by the artist with light yellow colour paint; only earth colours or vegetable colours or indigo are used. The colours are then mixed with gum and water and painted one colour after the other, in the order of orange, yellow, and so forth. Black is the last colour paint used for the border. However, traditionally, no gold colour was ever used.

On an auspicious day, the artist signs at the centre of the painting, close to the image of the main deity. Signature of the Bhopa who commissions the painting is also included, but it is optional. As a last act, the artist is said to give 'life' or "awaken the deity" of the painting by opening the pupil in the eyes of the main deity at the centre of the painting. It is now that Phad belongs the Bhopa and not the artist.

The Phad is now a living temple and the Bhopa and Bhopi traverse villages narrating stories which enthrall and educate the audience. [1]

References

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