

UNIT 20 – UPSC - Later Mural Traditions (Indian Culture Series – NCERT)

In this article titled 'Later Mural Traditions', we discuss about the mural traditions developed in India after the initial mural traditions of Ajanta, Ellora, and other such sites. This article is a part of the Indian Culture series based on the NCERT text book 'An Introduction to Indian Art' – Part 1. We have already discussed in detail about the Prehistoric Era Art and the early Rock Paintings in our previous posts. The article 'Later Mural Traditions' is a continuation of the previous posts like Arts of the Mauryan Period and Post Mauryan Trends in Indian Art and Architecture.

Later Mural Traditions

- Even after Ajanta, very few sites with paintings have survived which provide valuable evidences to reconstruct the tradition of painting.
- The sculptures too were plastered and painted and the tradition of cave excavation continued further in many places where sculpting and painting were done simultaneously.

Badami-

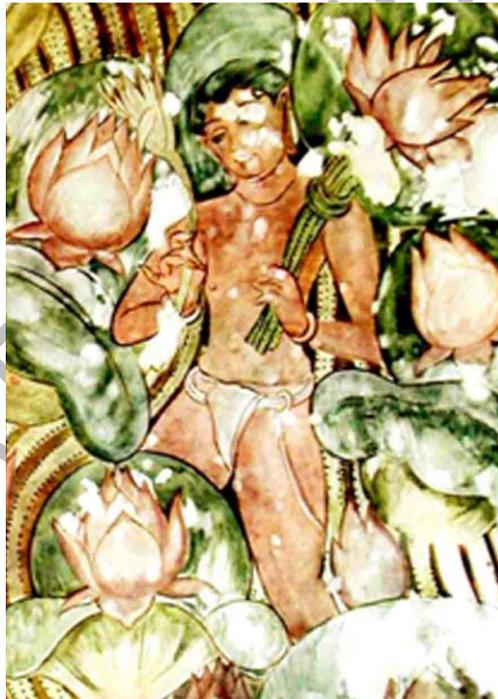
- One of the examples of later Mural tradition is Badami, Karnataka.
- It was the **capital of the western Chalukyan dynasty**, which ruled the region from 543 to 598 CE.
- With the decline of the Vakataka rule, the Chalukyas established their power in the Deccan.
- The **Chalukya king, Mangalesha, patronized** the excavations of Badami caves. He was the younger son of the Chalukya king, Pulikeshi I, and the brother of Kirtivarman-I.



Queen and attendants, Badami

- The **cave No. 4 is popularly known as Vishnu cave** and in the inscriptions patron (Mangalesha) records his Vaishnava affiliation.
 - One of the paintings shows Kirtivarman, the son of Pulikeshi I and the elder brother Mangalesha, seated inside the palace with his wife and feudatories watching a dance scene.
 - Stylistically the painting represents an extension of the tradition of mural paintings from Ajanta to Badami in south India.
 - The sinuously drawn lines, fluid forms and compact composition exemplify the proficiency and maturity the artist had achieved in the 6th century CE.
 - The gracefully drawn faces remind us of the style of modelling in Ajanta.
 - Their eye sockets are large, eyes are half closed, and the lips are protruding.
- Murals under Pallava, Pandava and Chola kings-
- The tradition of painting extended further down south in Tamil Nadu in the preceding centuries with regional variations during the regime of Pallava, Pandya and Chola dynasties.

- The Pallava kings, who succeeded the Chalukyas in parts of the south India, were also patrons of the arts.
- Mahendravarman (Pallava) who ruled the 7th century CE was responsible for building temples at Panamalai, Mandagapattu, and Kanchipuram.
- **The inscriptions at Mandagapattu mentions Mahendravarman I with numerous titles such as Vichitrachitta (curious minded), Chitrakarapuli (tiger among artists), Chaityakari (temple builder), which shows his interests in art activities.**
- Paintings in Kanchipuram temple were patronized by the Pallava king, Rajasimha.
- Increased ornamentation was a notable feature of these paintings when compared with the paintings of the earlier period.
- When the Pandyas rose to power, they too patronized art.
- Tirumalaipuram caves and Jaina caves at Sittanvasal are some of the



Sittanvasal – early Pandya period

surviving examples.

- The tradition of building temples and embellishing them with carvings and paintings continued during the reign of the Chola kings who ruled over the region from 9th to the 13th
- But it was in the 11th century, when the Cholas reached their zenith of power, the masterpieces of Chola art and architecture began to appear.

- **The temples of Brihadeswara at Tanjore, Gangaikonda Cholapuram and Darasuram were built during the reign of Rajaraja Chola and Rajendra Chola.**
- The important paintings of Chola period can be seen at Nartamalai and Brihadeswara temples.
- In Brihadeswara temple, the paintings were executed on the walls of the narrow passage surrounding the shrine.
- Two layers of paints were found when they were discovered.
- The upper/outer layer was painted during the Nayaka period, in the 16th century.
- The Chola paintings at Brihadeswara are showing the aspects related to the Lord Shiva, Shiva in Kailash, Shiva as Tripuranartaka, Shiva as Nataraja, a portrait of **Rajaraja and his mentor Kuruvar**, dancing figures, etc.

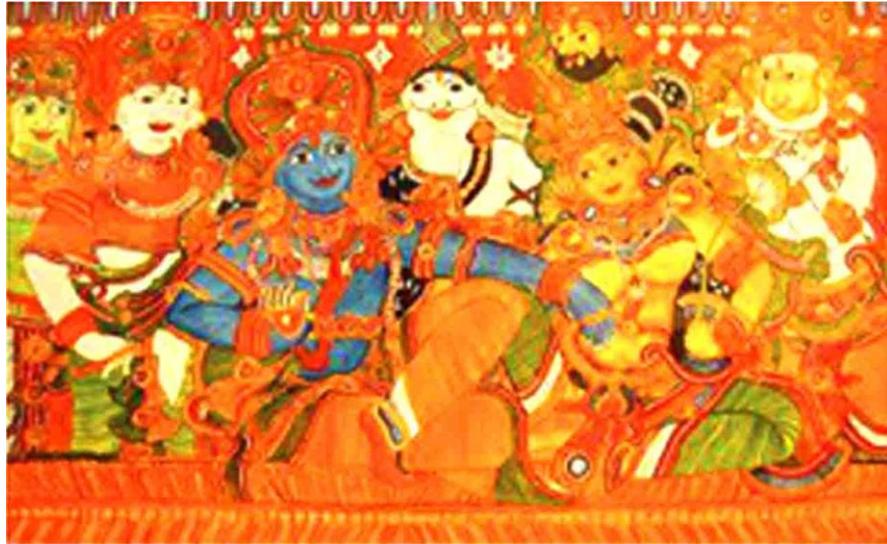
Vijayanagara Mural-

With the decline of the Chola dynasty in the 13th century, the Vijayanagara dynasty captured and brought under its control the reign from Hampi to Trichy with **Hampi serving as its capital.**



Dakshinamurty, Vijayanagara, Lepakshi

- The paintings at **Tiruparakunram, near Trichy**, done in the 14th century represent the early phase of the Vijayanagara style.
- In **Hampi** (Karnataka), the Virupaksha temple has paintings on the ceiling of its mandapa narrating vents from dynastic history and episodes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.
- Among the important panels are the one which shows Vidyaranya, the spiritual teacher of Bukkaraya Harsha.
- In **Lepakshi**, near Hindupur, in present Andhra Pradesh, there are glorious examples of Vijayanagara paintings on the walls of the Shiva temple.
- The stylistic conventions of the proceeding centuries were adopted by artists in various centres in south India as can be seen in the paintings of the Nayaka period.
- **Nayaka paintings** in the 17th and 18th centuries are seen in Thiruparakuram, Sreerangam, and Tiruvarur (all in Tamil Nadu).
- In Tiruparakunram, paintings are found of two different periods – of the 14th and 17th Earlier paintings depict scenes from the life of Vardhamana Mahavira.
- The Nayaka paintings depict episodes from the Mahabharata and Ramayana and also scenes from Krishna Leela.
- In Tiruvarur, there is a panel narrating the story of Machukunda.
- In the Srikrishna temple at Ehengam in Arcot District there are 26 panels narrating the story of the Ramayana, which represents the late phase of the Nayaka paintings.
- From the examples, it suggests that **Nayaka paintings were more or less an extension** of Vijayanagara style with minor regional modifications and incorporations.
- The figures are **mostly set against a flat background** and the male figures are shown with slim waist but with less heavy abdomen as compared to those in Vijayanagara.



Kerala Mural

Kerala Mural-

- Kerala painters (16th to 18th century) evolved a pictorial language and technology of their own while discriminately adopting certain stylistic elements from Nayaka and Vijayanagara schools.
- The painters evolved a language taking cues from contemporary traditions like Kathakali and Kalam Ezhuthtu using vibrant and luminous colours, representing human figures in three dimensions.
- Most of the paintings are seen on the shrine walls, cloister walls of temples and some inside the palaces.
- Thematically too, paintings from Kerala stand apart.
- Most of the narrations are based on those episodes from Hindu mythology which were popular in Kerala.
- The artist seems to have derived sources from oral traditions and local versions of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata for painting narrations.
- More than 60 sites have been found with mural paintings.
- **The important palaces where mural paintings can be found are - Dutch Palace, Kochi, Krishna Puram palace, Kayamkulam and Padmanabhapuram palace.**
- The mature phase of Kerala's mural tradition can be seen at **Pundareekapuram Krishna Temple, Panayanarkavu, Thirukodithanam, Tripayar Sri Rama temple and Thrissur Vadakkunnatha temple.**

Some of the other traditional Murals are-

- Pithora – Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- Maithili – Bihar
- Warli – Maharashtra



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