

## Contribution of the Apabhramsa school of painting with reference to folklore illustration

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### Abstract

*The main aim of Indian painting is to refine and elevate human emotions. While Greek artists regarded the realistic depiction of nature as the highest level of artistic accomplishment, Indian artists maintain that a work of art is worthless if it fails to express a moral, religious, or emotional message. As a result, Indian painting is wholly focused on spirituality and has always promoted human morality. The medieval era witnessed a change in Indian painting styles beyond cave walls toward creative initiatives as a result of economic and social forces. As a consequence, various painting styles emerged. The Pala, Apabhramsha, Rajasthani, and other styles have all significantly contributed to the advancement of painting from the tenth to the eighteenth centuries. These many painting techniques offer an amazing window into Indian medieval civilization. Along with religious themes, love stories and folktales have also been portrayed in the Apabhramsh painting style in a unique way. The 15th century is regarded in Indian history as the period of cultural renaissance, during which fresh inspiration was injected into literature and art. Literature painted in 1451 AD that includes "Basant Vilas," "Mahapurana," "Chorpanchashika," "Laurchanda," "GeetGovind," "Ragmala," etc. has the earliest instances of this technique. The purpose of the research article is to examine the development and significance of the Apabhramsha painting style in depicting folk literature.*

**Key Words-** Miniature Painting, folklore, Apabhramsh Style, Basant Vilas, Mahapurana, Chairpanchashika, Laurchanda.

**1. Introduction -**Apabhramsha style holds an important place in the history of Indian painting. It is clear from various research studies that this style originated in places like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, etc. There have been differences of opinion among the scholars regarding the antiquity of Apabhramsha painting style, and from the research done so far, it has come to the conclusion that the period between Ajanta painting style and Rajput painting style is known as Apabhramsha painting style. There have been many differences of opinion among scholars regarding the name of this style. Due to the presence of this style in Shvetambar Jain texts, W. Norman Brown named it Shvetambar Jain style. (Jain, Rajesh, 1991-92. pp. 269)

N.C. Mehta called it the Gujarat style of painting because this style started in Gujarat itself. (Jain, Rajesh, 1991-92. pp. 269) Based on the initial evidence of the origin and development of this style obtained from Gujarat and Rajasthan in Western India, Tibetan historian Lama Taranath named this style Western-Indian style. Seeing this style in Jain paintings, Sarabhai Nabab called this style Western Jain art. (Jain, HeeraLal: 1962; pp.368) Raikrishna Das has considered this style a distorted form of the ancient style. For this reason, it is called Apabhramsha style. (Das, Raykrishna: 1996; pp. 3)

**1.1. Origin of Apabhramsha style:** The period from the 11th to the 16th centuries is considered to be the period of Jain painting. Basil Gray has considered the 15th–16th centuries to be the zenith of this style. At this time, this style was very powerful in the field of art. (Swami, K. Anandakumar: 2003; pp.3) No matter how many differences there may have been among thinkers regarding the names of this style, it is true that this style holds an integral place in art history. The refined form of Apabhramsha style gave birth to Rajasthani style. We can see the original form of this style in wall paintings, Manuscripts, illustrated cloth Painting, VigyaptiPatta, etc.

**1.2 Introduction of folklore depiction:** Through Jain art, artists have tried to present the ideals of Jain philosophy and conduct. Along with artistic beauty, painting also elevates the spiritual outlook of humans. The main purpose of art is the expression of feelings. In the Apabhramsha style, the painters created a new style by making a meaningful effort to express the full range of emotions, even by depicting the artworks in simple form. The subject matter of these paintings plays an important role in depicting religious and spiritual sentiments as well as folk literature.

The main credit for publishing the pictures of folklore goes to various scholars like W. Norman Brown, O.S. Ganguly, M.R. Majumdar, N.S. Mehta, U.P. Shah, etc. Examples of paintings in this category can be seen in the form of love affairs and love texts. Prominent among these are Laurachanda, Madhavanal-Kamakandala, Rati-Rahasya, Vasant Vilas, Damayanti Katha, and Panchatantra. Apart from the Panchatantra, all the poems are hero-heroine-oriented and are explained as follows:

**1.2.1. Rati-Rahasya-** The basis of Rati-Rahasya has been the Kamasutra text of Vatsyayan. Which was composed by KokkakBhat in the 13th century AD. At first, Shri S.M. Navab published a painted page of Kamadeva of Rati-Rashasya. (Nawab, S. M.: 1936) At present, this painting is in the collection of Amritlal Bhojak of Patan. Apart from the picture of Kamdev in this museum, information about other pictures of this manuscript is not found. This picture

appears to be close to the Kalakacharya Katha (Patan), painted in 1414 AD. (Chandra, Moti and Shah, 1975, Khandelwala, and Chandra Moti: 1969. F. 5-8)

The second page of RatiRahasya was published by U. P. Shah in 1971 in the Baroda Museum Bulletin; before that, this picture was the glory of Sarabhai Nawab's collection. (Shah, U.P.: 1971) The illustrated page of the Rati-Rahasya, stored in the Baroda Museum, is probably the second page of the original copy. It is in very bad condition. (Shah, U.P.: 1971) Both sides of this page are illustrated. On the front surface, a human figure seated on an elephant with a bow and arrow is depicted, which appears to be that of Kamadeva.

**1.2.2. Damayanti Katha-Champu-** This book was written by a Hindu writer named Trivikrama in Sanskrit, in which the story of Damayanti is mentioned. (Kumar, Shailendra: 2009; pp.72) Two of its illustrated pages are in the collection of the Lalbai Dalpat bhai Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad, which is in very dilapidated condition. U.P. Shah and Motichand were the first to publish this page. (Chandra, Moti and Shah, U.P. 1975, pp. 17-18) While one of the paintings has a beautiful image of Shiva and Parvati, the other, divided into two parts, depicts Bhima with his courtiers in the upper part and Bhima with his wife in the lower part. Dr. Motichandra and Dr. U. P. Shah have considered their creation period to be between 1400 and 1425 AD, keeping in view their size and palm leaf tradition. These paintings show the peculiarities of the western Indian culture of the 15th century. In the scene of Shiva-Parvati, both hands of Shiva holding the serpent in his neck are raised, with a trident in one and Khatvana in the other. They are adorned with garlands. These paintings are wonderfully done.

**1.2.3. Basant Vilas-** The subject of this book relates to the love games of the heroes and heroines during the spring season. There are several copies of this poem, but only one has been illustrated. The time and place are mentioned in the painting, based on which it can be said that this copy was painted in Ahmedabad in VikramSamvat 1508 (1451 AD). Under the direction of Shah ShriChandrapal, the son of Shah Depal, AcharyaRatnagar produced this copy. (Mehta, N.C.,1925, pp. 62) This copy is now in the collection of the Friar Gallery of Art in Washington. The copy is 436 × 9 inches long and wide, originally containing 84 paintings, but now only 79 remain. (W. Norman Brown: 1962; pp. 6) Some of the motifs of this painting are similar to the references in Chitrasutra and the paintings of Sanyog and Shringar depict the theme of the amusement of the lover and the beloved, the moments of the union of the hero-heroine roaming on the banks of the lake, swinging and swinging etc. (Fig. 1). Along with this a wonderful combination of hovering clouds, trees swaying in the wind, wild animals and birds with limited lines and colors has been done. The trees depicted in the background are also of various types

with the depiction of swaying date palms, maulasris and palm trees (Fig. 2). There is a wonderful depiction of animals and birds in this painting (Fig. 3). In this painting, Harsh Ullas and Virhani women are depicted together. According to N. C. Mehta, there are many such paintings in this Chitramala, which have also been depicted in the Ragamala and Nayaka-Nayika Bheda series of Rajasthan school of paintings in the following years. Heroine attracting deer, (W. Norman Brown: 1962; pp. 57) (Todi Ragini) swinging hero-heroine, (Mehta, N.C.: 1931. pp. 19) (Raag-Hindol) etc. are seen in the depiction.

**1.2.4. Panch-tantra-** Some of the Panchatantra paintings are collection in the Bharat Kala Bhavan at the Kashi Hindu University. In these paintings only the regular Apabhransha style has been used. A painting in the collection of Bharat Kala Bhavan depicts the various moods of the monkeys, their playful tendencies, looking back in shock, etc. These paintings are reminiscent of the painted scene of dancing monkeys of Panchteerthapata painted in 1433 A.D.

**1.2.5. Laurachanda-** It is a love story with Lorik as the hero and Chanda as the heroine. In Awadhi language the famous Sufi saint Mulla Dawood has composed a poem named Chandayan. This story has been very popular in Bihar, Chhattisgarh and some parts of Uttar Pradesh. There is no clear evidence about its antiquity, the word 'Lorik Nacho' is mentioned in the text Varnaratnakar composed by the Jyotishwer Thakur of Mithila in the 14th century. (Gupta, Parameshwari Lal: 1964; pp. 57-58) It is possible that this folk dance is related to the story of Lorik and Chanda. The revelation of Sufi philosophy increases the significance of this apparition. Among the scholars the illustrated copy of this poem has become famous by the name of Laurachanda. (Khandelwal, Karl: 1950; pp. 24) The Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benares Collection, has 6 painted pages of Laurachanda, which were first published by Padmavibhushan Rai Krishna Das. These paintings have been dated to 1540 AD and are believed to be from eastern Uttar Pradesh. (Das Krishna, Roy: 1955-56) But Karl Khandelwal and Dr. Motichandra have described it as the creation of Jaunpur region in the last 25 years of the 15th century. (Karl, Khandelwala and Chandra, Moti: pp. 55) whereas one of the copies mentioned by Dr. Saryu Doshi bears the date 1454 A.D. It would be impossible to say how many of pages of this manuscript there were. In the background of the above pictures, a red color has been used, and in the night scenes, a blue color has been filled. In one of the paintings, Lorik is depicted in a dynamic pose throwing a lasso in Chanda's room, and then Chanda's eagerness to see the lasso comes forward, etc. In this manuscript, only bulls and elephants are depicted in animal forms, and the scenes are divided into two or three parts, for which rope-like drawings and straight strips have been used. Adorned borders have also been added to the

picture. In Bharat Kala Bhavan, one painting (Registration No. 0-228) depicts lotus petals, and the other (Registration No. 0-221,230) depicts waving vines. The depiction of the inscribed margins is found only in the Mandu Kalpasutra; the other traditional Apabhramsha style of paintings do not have ornate margins. Dr. Parameshwari Lal Gupta drew attention to the State Library of Berlin's Laurachanda, (Chandra, Pramod: 1976)

which is today in the State Library of Berlin (No. 0-1900-215, Oriental Section No. 0-3014). The number of pages featured in it is 141. Like the other copies, each verse was illustrated in this copy. There are several pictures of each event. In these paintings, Vastu, sky, and clouds are depicted in the upper part, and hunting grounds, forests, ponds, gardens, etc. are depicted in the lower part. The copy contains a scene from the battle of Rao Rupchand and Sahadeva depicting the soldiers in three sections. (Kumar, Shailendra: 2009 pp. 80)

The paintings in this copy and those of Lurchanda in the Prince of Wales Museum show similarities in composition.

The Apabhramsa Style also depicts the themes of the Vaishnava and Shakta cults, of which Balgopalastuti, Geet-Gavinda, and the manuscript of Devi Mahatmya are prominent.

**1.2.6. Balgopalastuti-** Balgopalastuti was composed by Leelashuk and Vilwamangal and describes the supernatural bala-lilas of Sri Krishna and his playful games with gopas, which Dr. M. R. Majumdar has discussed in his publications. (Majumdar, M.R.: 1947) Six illustrated copies of Balgopalastuti have come to light, which are in museums like Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras, N.C. Mehta Gallery, Ahmedabad, Boston Museum, etc. For the first time in 1929, AD Shri O.C. Ganguly discovered the Balgopalstuti stored in the Boston Museum. The manuscript has 34 illustrated pages. A particularly striking scene in this copy is the depiction of cowherds, showing Krishna with the cowherds. (Majumdar, M.R.: 1947) The painting has cows lined up in a thin strip at the bottom, and in the main part, Shri Krishna is depicted with two Gwalas, with a twisted stick in the hand of the Gwalas and tall trees in the background. Much of the similarity can be seen in BalgopalStuti's cow grazing paintings in Boston and Baroda (Accession No. P.G. 0.6 F. 0.3, Folio. No. 0.3-3 in Baroda Museum). Another picture is of Ahilya's salvation, in which Ahilya is standing on the right with a garland in her hand. In front of her are Rama and Lakshmana with bows and arrows. Sage Shrestha is standing at some distance behind Lakshmana, and in the background of the picture, the waving clouds are depicted. When Dr. M.R. Majumdar went to Delhi to attend the meeting of the Indian Historical Records Commission in 1948, Dr. Vasudev Sharan showed him the manuscript. Dr. Majumdar published an article on this manuscript in Kanhaiya Lal

Podhar, Abhinandan Granth, and published its three pictures, Ahilya's salvation, Radha-Krishna Milana, Dhruva's Tapasya, etc. (Khandelwal, Karl: 1953)

It is not known how many paintings are in this manuscript. The painting composition of Ahalya 's salvation resembles the Ahalya salvation scene of the painting collected in Boston. Paintings of another volume of *Balgopalstuti* are in the N. C. Mehta collection, Ahmedabad. In which there is an important scene of *Sita Haran* (NCM 241.5) (Fig. No. 4). (Parimoo, Ratan: 2010) In this painting, the artist started a new tradition by depicting the major events of Sita Haran in sequence. In this painting, Sita pointing towards the golden deer, Rama going behind the deer, Ravana coming after finding Sita alone, and Rama fainting in the separation of Sita, etc., scenes have been depicted very beautifully. In addition to the Ramayana, there is a beautiful depiction of Krishna's pastimes, the main themes of which are: Krishna dancing with the gopis (NCM - 241.4) (Fig. No. 5), Kaliya Damana (NC 0M 0-241.3) (Fig. No. 6), and Krishna Radha Milan (NCM -241.2) (Fig. No. 7). etc. There is a scene of dancing female figures in the copy of this museum in which the postures of these figures are amazing.

**1.2.7. Geetgovinda-** The Gita Govinda poem by Jayadeva is also very important in the depiction of Vaishnava themes. Its construction is considered to be from the 12th century AD. In this text, the leelas of Radha-Krishna are described in detail. in which Shringar is given the role of spirituality. The poet has depicted Radha in the enchanting atmosphere of spring, in the meditation of Krishna. There is only one copy of the Gita Govinda depicted in this style, this copy is incomplete, it contains only scenes of the various incarnations of Sri Krishna. A scene of the Vamana avatar in this copy is very beautifully depicted (Fig. 8). The first publication of this copy was done by Dr. M.R. Majumdar in 1938, and he accepted its depiction in Gujarat in the middle of the 15th century. (Majumdar, M.R., 1968)

**1.2.8. Prabodhachandra-** A painted page each of the plays Prabodhachandrodaya and Harileela Solahakala manuscripts is in the collection of the Oriental Institute, Baroda. (Shah, U.P., 1976) The author of Prabodhachandrodaya is Krishna Mishra. This is a formative drama dominated by Shantarasa and containing a dramatic counterpoint to the monism of Vedanta. The philosophy of spirituality has been given in a very interesting way by imagining Moha, Vivek, Dambha, Jnana, Shraddha, Bhakti, Vidy, Buddhi, etc. as male and female characters.

**1.2.9. Deevi Mahaatmya-** In the thirteen chapters of Devi Mahatmya or Saptashati, there is a detailed description of the destruction of the Asuras by Goddess Durga or Chandi and the grace of the Goddess on King Suratha and Samadhi Vaishya. Dr. Anand Krishna published some

pictures of this copy. (Krishna, Ananda: 1963) This manuscript is one of the most important of the Kala Bhavan Banaras. Since the stylistic features of these paintings are similar to those of Malwa, Dr. Anand Krishna considered them to be the creations of the Malwa region. Compared to other copies, this copy is more developed, and its battle scenes are more complex. In one scene of this copy, the mutilated bodies of the demons lying on the battlefield are depicted in a traditional way. (Krishna, Ananda: 1963) Another copy of Devi Mahatmya is in the collection of the Baroda Museum, which has 35 pages with illustrations on 10 pages. The credit of publishing these paintings goes to Dr. M. R. Majumdar. (Majumdar, M.R., 1940; and Majumdar: 1947)

The main themes in these paintings are Chand-Mund Vadh, Dhrumlochan Vadh, Madhu Kaitabh Vadh, Devi's boon to Surath and Samadhi, Devi's war with the armies of Shumbha, etc. Dr. Majumdar has said that these paintings show the infinite power of the Goddess, who destroys the vices and egoism in a person with her grace. (Majumdar, M.R., 1940) These paintings depict the goddess form of Durga as well as her destructive form. It is very impressive how the painter captures the goddess's great beauty and power.

Apart from the above-mentioned subjects, there are some other subjects in Ragamala and Natyashastra. Ragmaala is depicted on the margin of a scroll of Kalpasutra collected in the collection of S.M. Nawabs.

**1.3. Characteristics of Apabhramsa school of painting**-The human figures in Apabhramsa style are painted flat. Due to lack of shadow-light effect, the real form of the figures has disintegrated. In the painting, the lines are depicted as intersecting, angular, and flowing. Due to the thinness of the chest space, the difference between male and female figures has almost disappeared. Thin waist like that of a lion has been depicted. The depiction of the sided eye and the pointed nose are depicted. The outfits are filled with opaque, flat colors. The garments are decorated with geometric motifs (Fig. 9). Apart from costumes, these geometrical motifs are also depicted on bed sheets, on thrones, on canopy etc.

Bright colors are used in the paintings. Paintings from around 1450 AD used ultramarine in combination with gold, highlighting a grand look in miniature paintings. In the 15th and 16th centuries, these miniatures underwent various changes under the influence of other regional styles, which played an important role in the development of manuscript illustration.

**2. Findings-** The main findings of the paper are:

1. Ajit Ghosh has considered these paintings to be technically superior.
2. Despite the rigidity of the drawing, these paintings represent the inner expression of the artist.
3. The main feature of paintings in this style is their decorative splendor.
4. Abstract forms are also seen in these paintings.
5. The paintings also contain mystical elements and symbolic motifs.
6. After the Ajanta paintings in Indian painting, a new style is seen in the form of Apabhramsa style.

**3. Conclusion-** This style has a distinct identity in miniature paintings due to its characteristics, values, moods, and modesty. It is clear from the present study that the stylistic features of Apabhramsa style paintings paved the way for later styles. Also, the themes of their paintings have remained the same. For example, the depiction of religious theme is prominent in Apabhramsa style and 'Ragmala' in Rajasthani style. Similarly, in the Pahari style, the importance of 'Nayika-Bheda' is there, while in the southern style, the depiction of 'Krishna' is prominent. But these styles differ in form and size due to their local influences. The influence of each other's art on these styles has also influenced the background and stylistic beauty. The method of production of these miniatures is the same, but there is variety and unity in their presentation. The Apabhramsha style has made a tremendous contribution to bringing contemporary life and activities to the masses.

#### Paintings Images-



Fig. No. 1, 2, Basant Vilas, Vikram Samvat, 1508 (1451 AD), Freer Gallery of Art, Washington



Fig. No. 3: Basant Vilas, VikramSamvat, 1508 (1451 AD), Freer Gallery of Art, Washington



Fig. No. 4,5,6 and 7. BalgopalStuti (N.C.Mehata Art Gallery, Ahmedabad)

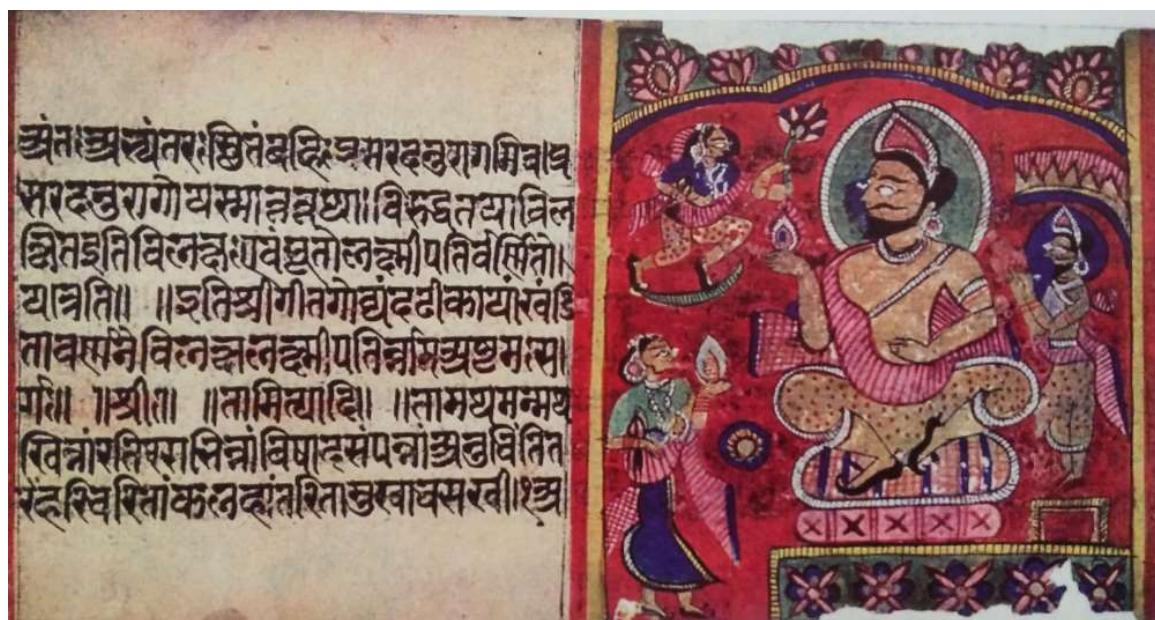


Fig. No-8-GeetGovind, 1938 A.D.

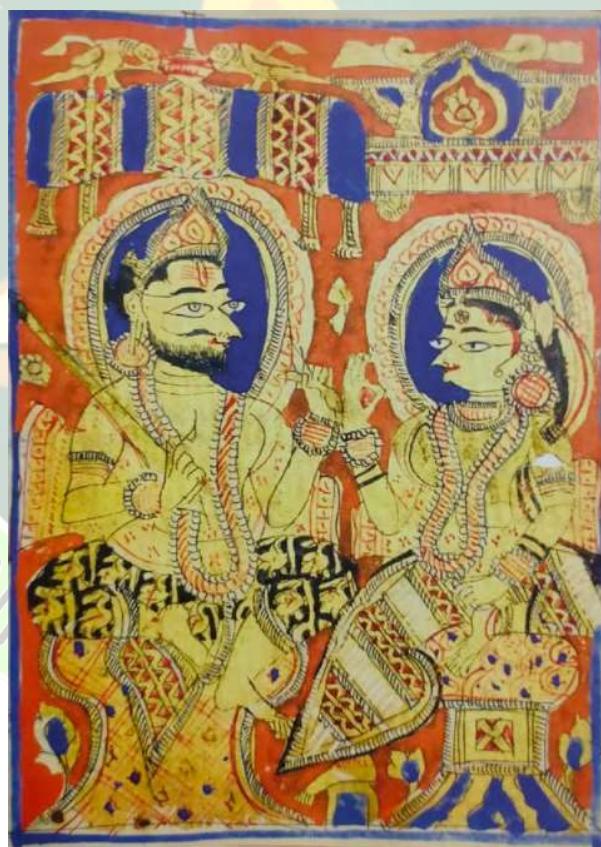


Fig. No.9, Kalpasutra (AN 0-78.561) 1483 AD, The National Museum, New Delhi

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