



REVIEW OF COLORS IN CHITRASUTRA OF VISHNU DHARMMOTRA PURANA

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ABSTRACT

Colors in a painting have both descriptive and suggestive implications. In one passage, Chitrasutra observes that delineation, shading, ornamentation, and coloring are all decorative aspects of a painting, while *rekha*, the lines that express the shapes, is the true substance of a painting. Nonetheless, colors are critical and significant aspects of a painting; they breathe life into a depiction. Colors endow a figure with personality and talk eloquently about its character and mood. When it comes to colors, Chitrasutra lists five primary colors, while others list only four (red, yellow, blue, and white); however, all agree on white as a primary color.

KEYWORDS : Colors, Chitrasutra, Painting, Primary Colors, Derivative Colors, Implications.

INTRODUCTION

Chitrasutra in one of its passages observes that delineation, shading, ornamentation and colouring are the decorative aspects of a painting; suggesting that *rekha*, the lines that articulate the forms, are the real substance of a painting. "The masters praise the *rekhas* –lines (delineation and articulation of form), the connoisseurs praise the display of light and shade, women like the display of ornaments, and the richness of colors appeals to common folk," the text says elsewhere.

Yet, the colors are very important and significant aspects of a painting; they enliven a depiction. The text says, "when a learned and skilled artist paints with golden (radiant) color, with articulate and yet very soft lines with distinct and well arranged garments; and graced with beauty, proportion, rhythm and inspiration, then the painting will truly be beautiful."

The six limbs (*anga*) of painting enumerated in the text include *Varnika-bhanga*, which represents the artistic manner of improvising colour combinations, tones and shades. It allows for the infusion of emotion as well as the creation of lustre and irradiance. That involves, among other things, delicate and skilful use of brushes and other aids. It represents the maturity of the artist's techniques and the fruitfulness of his experience. Colour, therefore, is a major medium in painting; the emotions and moods are expressed through manipulating colours, their density, tones, lines, light, shades etc. The ingenuity, imagination and skill of the artist discover their limitations here.

The *Sutra-pata-rekha* is the first line of the outline, whereas the *Subha-varti-rekha* is the completed sketch, ready for color. Now is the time for *mandala - karya*, drawing of curves, characterized as *manorama* (charming) and *askhalita* (unerring) is the final stage of *subha-varti-rekha*. In this stage, the initially blocked rough contours are carefully rounded off at their edges; and, a new grace is added to the figures by more definitive work. The initial coat of color is to be light (*virala vilepana*) and only the later depths are suggested by *Vartana*. The term *Varna-krama* indicates the general arrangement of color-scheme in a painting, the balancing of the tints to achieve a color-harmony. That term is also said to indicate the laying of tints like green, yellow and the rest (*varnakrama harita, pita adi varna-vinyasah*). Another term, *varna-sthiti* – is meant to indicate the color laid in its proper place in the picture. Such placement of just the right color in just the right place on the canvas is considered very essential, at least in the preliminary stages of coloring, when the effect of one color over the other, their contrast, the balance, the tone and such other details are to be determined. The refinements of touching and blending etc. might come in later at the proper time and place.

Colour – Symbolism & Suggestions

The colors in a painting have a descriptive and also a suggestive significance. Colours bestow a personality to a figure and speak eloquently of its character and mood. Colours also carry rich symbolism; they might depict the *gunas* such as the *satva*, *rajas* or *tamas*; and make explicit the essential character and attributes of an image.

In certain *Vasishnava* traditions, *Radha*, the personification of love and beauty, is adorned in the colour dearest to her, the enchanting blue of *Krishna*, while he is clad in *pitambar*, the lustrous golden hue of his beloved *Radha*, signifying *sanidhya*, the sense of being ever together.

There was, in addition, a class of pictures called *rasa-chitra*, the pictures of emotions, also called *varna-lekhy* meaning interpretations through colour. These were different from realistic paintings and sought deliberately to represent various emotions through distinct colours. In this school, idioms of colour visualized a range of emotions; and, each *rasa* had to be portrayed in its uniquely expressive colour. For instance, *Srinagar* (erotic) was of *shyama* hue (light sky blue); *hasya* (that which evokes laughter) in white; *karuna* (pathos) in gray; *raudra*, (the furious) in red; *vira* (the heroic) in yellowish-white; *bhayanaka* (the fearsome) in black; *adbhuta* (supernatural and amazing) in yellow; and *bhibathsa* (the repulsive) in blue colour.

The colours of our mythological figures represent, symbolize and convey their attributes. For example, the highest divinities with supreme attributes (*gunas*) are sky blue, signifying their true infinite nature; *Shiva*, the ascetic supreme yogi, is *Gauranga*; he is colorless and almost transparent, he is without any attributes; *Hanuman* and *Ganesh* are red like blood; full of energy, vitality, and life; and *Kali's* black does not signify absence of color but is the sum and culmination of all colors. Her black is endowed with limitless attraction powers that draw her entire existence into it.

During the later periods, the *Ragamala* School of painting attempted to translate the emotional appeal of a *Raga* into visual representations. Each *raga* was personified by a colour, mood, the nature surrounding the hero and heroine (*nayaka* and *nayika*). It also elucidated the season and the time of day and night in which a particular *raga* is to be sung. The colours, substance and the mood of the *Ragamala* personified the overall *bhava* and context of the *Raga*. It is a delightful amalgam of art, colour, poetry and music.

Primary & Derivative Colors

Talking of colors, Chitrasutra mentions basic colors as five, while the others only four (red, yellow, blue and white); though both agree on white as a primary color.

Chitrasutra, in chapter 27, mentions five primary colours (*mulavarna*): white (*svetha*), yellow (*pitha*), black (*krshna*),

green (harita) and red (raktha). The idea of four colors with yellow composed of gorochana; white sandal, crimson saffron; and dark musk in the varied hues of gems like turquoise, diamond, ruby and amethyst. In another place, it mentions white, yellow, black, blue (shyama) and the colour of myrobalan (the dried fruit of a bush that resembles a plum) as the five principal colors.

The text says, it would be impossible to enumerate the mixed colors in the world created by the dexterous mixing of various colors and their derivatives; the combinations are limited only by one imagination and logic. The mixing of two or three colors, in various shades and tones, and their manipulation is a mark of the artist's ingenuity. There is no limit to the numerous finer varieties of tints that can be produced by the imagination of the artist. Colouring should, however, be natural. It appears that the ancient artists' color palette was broad enough to render the local colors of the objects subtly.

Chitrasutra classifies the application of colours into four categories: as those that are employed to depict (i) the faithful representations of nature; (ii) the true proportions but largely exaggerated size of the object; (iii) artificial qualities and perspectives of objects; and, (iv) an admixture of the three.

Blue colour is said to be of three kinds: with white predominating, with very little white; or with both in equal parts. When blue is transformed a great deal, it becomes green; and, it could be pure green or an admixture of white; and green with blue predominating. Blue with black and red becomes metallic blue (nila-lohitha). Blue is transformed variously while in association with anything applied as an astringent. Blue tinged with yellow and white gives rise to a variety of colours and shades; and to blue-lotus colour when shaded dark.

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