Research Paper Painting

Nawalgarh Haveli Wall Paintings: the theme Depended on Mahabharata

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ABSTRACT

Wall painting as an art genre enjoyed great popularity in India starting in the 2nd century B.C., but attaining its pinnacle only in the 6th century A.D., with the spending paintings of Ajanta and then others. In the 16-17th centuries they underwent a vigorous revival and played an important role in the decoration of the royal palaces, in the homes of the noble and rich, in temples and cenotaphs. Unfornmately the inveterate Indian custom of periodically 'renovating' the decoration of homes and temples by repainting them or drastically erasing parts of them is leading to the destruction of important works of art from the past. The aim of the present book is also to document the serious damage caused to this Indian artistic heritage. The earliest examples of Indian painting, that we find evidence of, are on the walls of some of the caves in the Kaimur Range of Central India, Vindhya Hills and some places in Uttar Pradesh. Nawalgarh is a town in Jhunjhunu district of Indian state Rajasthan. It is part of the Shekhawati region and is midway between Jhunjhunu and Sikar. Nawalgarh is famous for its fresco and havelis and considered as Golden City of Rajasthan. It is also the motherland of some great business families of India. The theme of the wall painting or frescoes decorating the beautiful "havelis" of Shekhawati region has changed over a period of time. In the earlier days at the time of its inception, mythology dominated the themes of frescoes, which shows the local legends, animal, portraits, hunting and wrestling. But the traditional subjects were related to Ramayan and the great epic Mahabharata

Keywords : Wall paintings, Nawalgarh, Themes, Havelis, Frescoes, Mahabharata

Introduction:

Shekhawati has ever marked its presence on the national and international arena throughout trade and industry. However, during past few decades it has well registered its name with the world tourism too. Never would it attract the foreign visitors in so vast numbers as it has been attracting during past three decades. This part of the northeast Rajasthan about 100 to 200 kilometres north of Jaipur falling within the Sikar, Jhunjhunu and Churu districts has so far had an image of a sandy desert. The grand majestic forts, temples, palatial mansions or havelis. Nevertheless, they remained unnoticed. For, they remained unexposed to the eyes of the ruling Thikanas (small princely states), notably of Madawa, Dundlod, Fatehpur, and Nawalgarh did feel an urge to present these hidden treasures of art and culture before the eyes of the world community. Nawalgarh is a heritage city in Shekhawati region, 40 Km. from Jhunjunu and 27 km. from Sikar and 132 km. from Jaipur.

There are about 100 havelis in Nawalgarh with beautiful paintings and frescoes on walls. The havelis began to come in to existence after the last quarter of the eighteenth century. They are creations of the rich merchants built between 1780 to 1900-35. The beautiful paintings and frescos on the wall of havelis do not only feast the eyes of the visitors, but they also mirror the contemporary Shekhawati life, the ways, the customs, the faiths and beliefs of the people, and also the craftsmanship of the unlettered artists. Hear visitors come in large numbers from various countries of Europe such as England, France, Germany and Italy. The foreigners see paintings but they do not sufficiently understand the thematic aspects of the subjects presented. Perhaps the escorting guides also do not or cannot give adequate information. I have tried to explain the thematic aspects as are required by a common viewer.

Majority of the paintings presents the religious and spiritual aspects of life. They present either gods or their incarnations, or the holy sages and their lives as given in the Holy Scriptures. However, a sizeable portion of them presents other aspects of life too. Other main theme of the paintings depended on the great Indian epic Mahabharata. You must be familiar with the story of the great Indian epic Mahabharata, as it is quite an old and perhaps, the longest epic in the world literature. It has ever been so popular. The main story of the epic is the Great War, which the Pandavas and the sons of Dhritrastra fought over the fair division of the kingdom.

(i) Draupadi's Swayamvar :

Soon after Purochan's bringing the news of pandvas' death, Dhryodhan received another good news. King Drupad of Panchal had sent invitations for the *swayamvar* of his daugster Draupadi. As the story goes, Draupadi was born to the king under the blessings of the Fire God at a *yajna*. She was fascinatingly beautiful and carried several names as Krishna, Panchali, and Yagyasena. The dark complexioned princess is said to have a fragrant body, producing sweet smell like a champa flower. The princess came of age and the king organized a *swayamvar* for finding a suitable groom for her. He sent messages, inviting all major princes to try their hand and luck for the hand of his beautiful daughter. He had invited Prince Duryodhan of Hastinapur too. As Duryodhan had already heard a lot in praise of Draupadi, he had ever been dreaming to marry her and make her the queen of Hastinapur. Nevertheless, he also knew well the condition that Draupadi's father had laid for the participants.

Duryodhan was bold and dashing. He was very good at fighting with a *gadaa,* though not so proficient at archery, which the King's condition involved. Therefore, he decided to take Karna with him. Here, it would not be out of place to give a brief account of Karna and his life.

Karna was the some of Kunti conceived through the *Devahoot mantra* from the Sun God while she was not even married (a

reference has already been made on the *mantra*). Invoking the Sun God, she had recited the *mantra* just to experiment it. The god appeared and she was miraculously conceived. After nine months, she gave birth to a son. The son was born with the rare gifts of impene treble armour and golden rings into the ears, perhaps given to him by his father, the Sun God.

In Indian culture, pre-marital relations are a kind of taboo and the society does not approve of them. The society looks at a woman with scorn and contempt if she establishes physical relations with a man before marriage. Kunti knew it well. Therefore, to save herself from the social ignominy and insult, she put newborn baby into a wooden box and left it secretly at night into river *yamuna* to flow away. After many days and crossing several rivers, it reached near Prayag (in Uttar Pradesh). One morning, Adhirath,the principal charioteer of the Hastinapur court saw it floating on the *Ganga*. As Adhirath and his wife Radha did not have any child, they named him Karna (also Radheya). The parents brought up him, first in Champanagar, their native town and afterwards, in the royal court of Hastinapur.

It was the custom and practice that the *gurus* of the royal court would teach and train only the princes. Karna did not get the opportunity of learning from the royal *gurus*. For, in the eyes of the public, he was the son of a charioteer. Of course, the royal *gurus* Dronacharya and Kripacharya allowed him in the school but they would not impart him the knowledge or training of any kind themselves. As, he was the son of the Sun God and was born with rare powers and extraordinary qualities, he soon learned and mastered all the skills of war and weapons *on his own.*

Karna was an excellent archer. There was none among the princes to surpass him in the art of archery. Only Arjun was his equal. Since the condition in Draupadi's *swayamvar* involved the skill in archery, and as Duryodhan was not good at it, he decided to take Karna with him. Firstly, Duryodhan had full trust and faith in Karna. Karna too was loyal and dedicated to him. For, on several occasions, Duryodhan had stood by him and saved him from his insult by the *gurus* and some members of the court. Secondly, as Karna was a great archer, so if he himself failed, Karna could win and bring Draupadi as his queen to Hastinapur.

Duryodhan, taking Karna with him, left for Kampilya to participate in the *swayamvar*. They reached Kampilya. King Drupad and the prince Dhrishtadyumna received them with due honours. The kings and princes of other states also had come there. Principal among them were Jarasandha, Shishupal, Bhoj, Krishna, Saubal, Sahdev, Shalya, Virat, Suketu, and many more. The Pandavas had been living in disguise right since Duryodhan's attempt of bruning them. However, they too reached Kampilya, though disguised as *Brahmins.*

The day of the *swayamvar* came and the condition was set for the contest. Prince Dhrishtadyumna proclaimed it. Welcoming the guests, he said, "Honourable kings and princes, you are here to attend my sister's *swayamvar.* We feel very honoured and warmly welcome you all on the occasion." Then, he announced the condition set as a test for the *swayamvar.* "Let me tell you that we have set a test for the aspiring participants. My sister Yagyasena will marry him who will pass it. She will accept the successful brave hero as her husband and will serve him for whole of her life as his wife. The condition set is this: Up under the roof of the pavilion, there hangs a revolving wheel with a wooden fish attached underneath it. Beneath the wheel, there is the small pool of water on the ground. Soon, revolving round and round. The competitor will have to shoot a 'suchibaan' (a needle like thin and pointed arrow) from Lord Shiva's great big bow and hit into the eye of the revolving fish without directly seeing it. He can certainly view its reflection into the water and take as many chances as he wishes," said he and took his seat.

After proclaiming the condition, the prince ordered his attendants to bring Lord Shiva's bow from the magazine. They brought it at once and placed it on the spot fixed for the test. One by one, the kings and the princes, notably, Jarasandha, Shishupal, duryodhan and many more tried their hands at the bow. Some of them could not even lift the heavy arch up. Others did lift but could not pull the string and shoot an arrow. Yet others did shoot but they could not hit the target. At last, Karna arose and proceeded to try his luck. Draupadi saw it. At once, she cried, "Stop! I cannot marry you even if you hit the mark aright. I will marry a prince only. Not the son of a charioteer." Karna felt greatly disappointed and humiliated but he was helpless.

King Drupad and the prince Dhrishtadyumna were very disappointed. For, none of the princes could qualify at the test. That meant that Draupadi was going to remain unwedded. Nevertheless, Arjun was there. In ochre clothes and with long beard. He looked like a *Brahmin.* When king Drupad expressed his regret and disappointment at not finding even a single prince worthy enough to hold his daughter's hand, the great archer rose up and moved towards the shooting spot. Draupadi identified him and so did others. He took up the bow, placed an arrow on the string, and aiming at the mark reflecting into water, hit it right. There was a great applause at his success. Draupadi came forward and put the garland of lotus flowers around his neck, accepting him her husband. Shishupal of Chedi and the other defeated kings could not digest the win of a *'Brahmin'*. So rising in protest, they refused to accept his victory. A fight took place between the Pandavas and their adversaries, in which Karna lost his elder son. Finally, Krishna intervened and stopped the fight. The defeated princes, including the Kauravas left for their native places, quite in failure and disappointment. The victorious Pandavas and wife Draupadi set off for Mathura with Krishna. Paintings on such event can also be seen on the walls.

(ii) The Pandavas set up a Nue Kingdom:

After living with Krishna in Mathura for some time, the Pandavas returned to Hastinapur. They came to stake a claim for the kingdom that their father had won, defeating other kings. King Dhritrashtra had already been informing med of it. Hence, he called a special meeting of the courtiers to discuss the matter.

During past twenty years or so, Dhritrashtra had been on the throne of Hastinapur. However, he was the king in name only. In practice, his eldest son Duryodhan ran all the affairs of State. Duryodhan was quite wilful and arrogant. He had his own way of dealing with the people and conducting the state business, bothering not at all of a custom or a rule. After Pandu's death, as a rule his eldest son was to be the heir to throne. However, Duryodhan was not to give them any share in the kingdom. When the Pandavas claimed the part their father had won through victory; the wilful Duryodhan, at the behest of his maternal uncle Shakuni, turned down their demand. Shakuni and Duryodhan were not even ready to accept that the Pandavas in fact were the sons of Pandu. For, king Pandu had been living the life of a celibate in the forest under curse. It was not possible for him to produce any child in that state, they pleaded.

However, Shakuni offered them just the territory of Khandav forest, where they were born and their father had died and cremated. Yudhisthir, the eldest of the Pandava brothers, accepted it and soon they left Hastinapur and settled into the forest. The hard-working Pandavas soon cleared it of the trees and bushes. They levelled the uneven healths and moors, and built on the plain the excellent city of Indraprastha (Delhi, the present capital of India). They announced the territory as a sovereign kingdom, with Indraprastha as its capital, and Yudhisthir, the eldest of the Pandavas as its king.

Once settled, the Pandavas now shifted their attention on expanding their kingdom. Soon, they attacked the surrounding kingdoms. One, they won them and attached them to Indraprastha. Indraprastha went on growing and prospering in every respect. It enjoyed a better status and more glory

in comparison to Hastinapur. The news of Pandavas'success and prosperity was continuously reaching Duryodhan. It gnawed him like a throne in the flesh. Accordingly, he turned jealous and developed an antagonism towards his cousins. Now since Indraprastha had reached the utmost glory, king Yudhisthir and his brothers intended to hold a Rajsuya yajna.A Rajsuya yajna used to be a yajna performed under the care and supervision of great rishis. The king holding the yajna would ask other kings to pay a certain tax first. Only then, he would invite them to the yajna. In case, a king refused to the tax, he was required to fight with the organizer of the yajna. In a way, he was forced to pay the tax. It was a kind of acceptance of the supremacy and sovereignty of the yajna performer.Paintings can be seen presenting this kind of picture of this Yajna.

(iii) The Annihilation of Jarasandha:

As the Pandavas had planned and decided to perform a *rajsury yajna,* king Yudhisthir had sent his brothers Bheem, Arjun, Nakul and Sahdev in all the four directions (east, west, south and north) for announcing the holding of the *yajna* and also collecting tax from the kings. Many of the kings had already submitted. They thought others to be easy to conquer. Only Jarasandha, the king of Magadha seemed invincible. It has already been stated that he had the strength of a thousand elephants added with a large, strong and invincible army. Therefore, they thought that without removing him from the way, the success of the *yajna* was in doubt.

The Pandavas thought out a plan to kill Jarasandha. Though, Jarasandha was a cruel and vicious king, he was very generous and respectful to *Brahmins.* He would never let a *Brahmin* go empty-handed if the *Brahmin* came to seek some favour of him. It was a fast rule with him and he felt so proud to follow it. Therefore, they decided that Krishna, Bheem and Arjun should go in the guise of *Brahmins* and ask him for an assured gift.

The three left for magadha. They reached there and presented themselves in the court of the king. King Jarasandha received them with honour and respect. Then, he enquired them of the purpose they came with. Krishna was very wise and intelligent. He had already briefed Bheem and Arjun that they should get from him the promise of fighting a duel with Bheem. Like Jarasandha,Bheem also had strength of a thousand elephants and was a peer proper to fight duel with him. Therefore, Krishna first got a world of promise from him and then invited him to fight duel with Bheem. The arrogant Jarasandha readily accepted it.

The duel began. It continued for a long time. However, it remained undecided, as both were equally strong and skilled at it. At last, Bheem was exhausted. He was going to quit as he had given up all hopes of defeating Jarasandha. Krishna at once understood. He gave him the hint how the rivel could be overcome, as he knew well the secret of Jarasandha's power and strength. His body, as has already been explained in the foregoing pages, was made up by joining two halves into a complete single one. The only way to kill him was to split it again into two. Krishna, drawing attention of Bheem, picked up a straw and split it into two parts. Through this action, he gave a hint to Bheem that he should also do the same with Jarasandha. Bheem caught the clue and soon split his body into two parts from above the waist. Jarasandha died. When he died, the way to yajna was smooth and clear from his side. For, the Pandavas did not feel any difficulty to defeat the kingless armies of Jarasandha. As was expected, his forces soon submitted themselves to Pandavas and accepted their supremacy and sovereignty. Thus, Jarasandha and his rule ended can be seen almost on the walls of every haveli.

(iv) The Pandavas Perform Yajna and Krishna Kill Shishupal:

The Pandavas had done all arrangements for the yajna. It was going to being now. They had invited the kings and princes of various kingdoms. The invitees had turned up Indraprastha in due time. Even the Kauravas (the members of the Hastinapur family and the sons of Dhritrashtra, so referred after the Kuruvansh, the royal dynasty of Kuru) and other prominent personalities from Hastinapur too had come. The Pandavas had extended a special invitation to Krishna. He too had come from Dwarika. So had Shishupal from Chedi. The Pandavas received and welcomed them all with due honours. However, they accorded Krishna a special honour. Yudhisthir washed his feet with the water of the holy Ganga and drank some of it as a sacred drink.

They had already appointed rishis to conduct the yajna rituals. But there was one more custom. It was of appointing the yajnavetta. (Yajnavetta used to be a person of a high rank, proficient and well versed in the yajna rituals, enjoying the status of a distinguished celebrity for leading others at yajna and inaugurating yajna by offering the first oblation in the pyre.) Who should be awarded the special honour? Many noted celebrities were present there. Bhishma, the senior most member of the family was there. Dronacharya, the family guru was also there. The matter was thoroughly discussed. On Sahdev's suggestion, Krishna was considered the most appropriate person for it. Therefore, Yudhisthir awarded him the special honour of yajnavetta.

Right after Krishna's marriage with Rukmini, Shishupal was quite sour and inimical at him. He was full of bitterness towards him. He always waited to insult or embarrass Krishna. He too was seated in the *yajna* pavilion. Ashe was quite inimical toward Krishna; He did not relish Yudhisthir's decision of appointing Krishna the *yajnavetta.*

Keeping with the programme, Krishna was just going to light the yajna pyre. At once, Shishupal stood up in protest and said, "Stop, Yudhisthir! By appointing the son of a shepherd yajnavetta, you are insulting us, the brave heroes of the Aryan land." By referring to Krishna as the son of a 'shephered', he was obviously offending him. He further spoke, "Many great heroes such as Bhishma, Dhritrashtra, Duryodhan, Dushasan, and Shalya, the king of Madra; Jayadratha, the king of Sindhu;Shakuni and Drupad are present here. The renowned scholars and honourable family gurus such as Draun, Krip, Vidur, and Ashwatthhama too are present here. Yet, discarding them all, you have granted the black shepherd the honour of yajnavetta. Don't you feel ashamed of it?"

Krishna was calmly smiling. He had exercised a thorough self-restraint. Nevertheless, Shishupal had lost all restraint on his tongue. He was incoherently raving at Krishna without any pause. He further said, "How you dared to make this shephered yajnavetta? You, Yudhisthir! What does he know about yajna? He has been living the life of a vagabond, wandering in the forests and twisting the tails of cows. Worse still, you have washed his dirty feet smeared in dung and cow urine, and accepted the dirty water as a sacred offering. If this is not a murderous insult of us, what else it...Krishna is is a lustful rascal, all the time dancing with young girls of the shepherds. He is the murderer of Kansa, his own maternal uncle! He is a coward, who, showing his back to Jarasandha, deserted his motherland and fled to Dwarika." Then turning at Krishna, he spoke to him, "Don't you feel ashamed to get your feet washed by a Kshatriya (the member of a ruling class) and to sit on this golden throne? Better, you stand up and are off to your Dwarika!"This was too much. Shishupal had crossed all limits of decency and nice behaviour. Therefore, Krishna too stood up and said, warning him," Shishupal, you are going out of your limits. I had promised to pardon you for your ninety-nine sins. You have already committed them. If you further spoke any foul, that would be the hundredth one. Take care! You shall suffer for that."Saying so, he resumed his seat. However, Shishupal was too adamant to Krishna. Therefore, taking up his sharp dish (chakra), he charged it at Shishupal's head. The 'brave' prince kept on running from place to place to save his life. But, he could not. Seeing his escape impossible, he ran and jumped into a river and was seen no more. He was dead and with him was dead his pride and arrogance too.

Many paintings carry this aspect of the death of Shishupal.

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