Research Paper

Painting



Nawalgarh Haveli Wall Paintings: The Theme Depended on Avataras

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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 and Avataras.

KEYWORDS

Wall paintings, Nawalgarh, Themes, Havelis, Frescoes, Avataras.

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.

Avataras

The Thought behind Avatara: God is immortal, eternal. He has no shape and no definite attributes. He is an invisible Supreme Being, beyond perception. He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. This the sages and the Holy Scriptures say. A question may arise here. If God is present everywhere, even in the smallest of objects, say, a particle of dust, why does then He takes incarnation? Why does then the supreme formless being or an animal? Lord Krishna, God himself answers in the Bhagyat Gita:

Yadayadahi dharmasya Glanirbhavti Bharatah. Abhyutthanamdharmasya Tadatmnan srijamyaham.

[O Bharat (Arjuna), whenevar virtue and righteousness perish and evil does prosper; I take an incarnation then and appear before the world in a physical form.]

Paritranaya sadhunan Vinashaya ch duskritam, Dharmsansthapnaarthaya Sambhavami yuge yuge.

[To liberate the gentle from suffering, to punish and annihilate the doers of evil, to restory the reign of righteousness, I come in this universe from time to time.]

Earth is an abode of sorrows and miseries. It is only natural for the earthly creatures to suffer from them. When the sufferers get no respite, they seek the help of God or God Himself takes care of them. Then, He acquires some form and appears on the earth. He helps and rids his devotees of the misery. There is another belies too. God assumes various forms and provides the righteous souls an opportunity for His worship and devotion. In fact, one cannot develop faith and devotion towards God without His presence in a concrete form, commanding the devotee's respect. When God appears in a celestial form, the form finds room in the devotee's mind and captures his heart forever. His baser feelings are gone and the pious, holy soul begins to sing His glory. The devotee realizes and sees God at all places and in all objects. Thus, he establishes a direct contact with Him. When required, God assumes a form and appears to help him. According to the Hindu scriptures, avataras are of various kinds. Some are partial. Others are full or complete. In the partial avataras, the Lord appears with a particular objective and a limited power to achieve it. He takes a full avatara when everywhere there is disorder and chaos. The demonic forces turn active and dominant, making it difficult for the gentle souls to live on earth. Then God comes in the form of a man with rare powers to live on earth and annihilate the evil forces, restoring order thereon. According to our scriptures, only Ram and Krishna took full avataras. Rest all were the partial ones.

The Hindu Trinity: Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu: 1.1 Lord Brahma:

Lord Brahma is thought to be the first member of the Hindu trinity. Vishnu is the second and Shiva, the third one. The three gods represent the three fundamental powers of nature. The three powers: creation, maintenance, and destruction are manifest and perpetually coexist simultaneously in the world. Brahma is the god of creation. He is traditionally accepted as the Creator of the universe. Apart from Brahma, Vishnu is the god of maintenance and Shiva, the god of destruction. How and from whom was Brahma created? There is an interesting story in the Puranas. After the great deluge, Lord Narayana, with the Supreme Being lodged in his body, went into a long sleep like trance. He rested on the bed of Shesha, the hundred-headed snake, on the ocean. When the spell of deluge was over, his trance got broken and he opened his eyes with thorough awareness. He saw before his eyes a flower of lotus grown from his naval, and Lord Brahma seated atop the petals. Curiously, he (Brahma) wanted to look around in all the four directions. Hence, four heads appeared on his body. He cast his glance far and deep around him. But, he noticed nothing, except a formless void around him. Quite confounded, he asked himself, "There is just a formless void and nothing also I see. From where has the lotus appeared then? Who am I and what is my source?" He found no answer to the questions. Then with a faith in God, he began to ponder over the questions and solve the riddle. He pondered over them quite for a long time. Suddenly, He looked down the lotus and noticed Vishnu, sleeping on the Shesha (the hundred-headed snake) on the ocean. Brahma felt much happy to have his darshan (a glimpse of the holy being). Vishnu, pleased with his faith and devotion, bestowed Brahma with the powers of creation, and success in it. On Vishnu's advice, Goddess Saraswati entered the heart of Brahma and got all the four Vedas (the first and great books of knowledge) and other Holy Scriptures recaptures' recited from his four mouths. After that, she created the psychic sons as Manu, Marichi, Pulastya Angira, Bhrigu< Vashishtha, and Daksha to continue and extend the creation. According to Hinduscriptures, Brahma's first creations as man and woman were Manu and Shatrupa. They were created out of his body, Manu from the left and Shatrupa from the right side part of it. Brahma has four faces, which represent four Vedas. He has four hands, in which, he has a kamandala (a water container), Vedas, a shruva (sacrifical implement), and a mala (rosary). He is seen mounted on the swan, though on the earliest iconographic descriptions, he is represents the reality or the glorious existence. Sitting on the lotus, Brahma indicates that he is ever rooted in the infinite reality. Gayatri (also Savitri) is seen sitting on his left side and Saraswati on to the right one. When mother earth is oppressed by the evil and demonic forces, she acquires the form of a cow and goes to Brahma for help. Gods too do it whenever they are in difficulty. Brahma then asks Vishnu to take an incarnation and bring respite to take an incarnation and bring respite to the sufferers.

1.2 Goddess Saraswati:

Saraswati is the goddess of wisdom, intelligence, cosmic knowledge, consciousness, creativity, enlightenment, music, art, knowledge, and education. She has several names as Sharda, Vagdevi, and Veenavadini etc. You will see her image on the main entrance of educational institutions in India. The school children sing a prayer, invoking her blessing before they go into the class to study. In her early incarnations, she is presented as a river. Symbolically, she is the river of conscious-

ness that enlivens creation. She is the dawn-goddess whose rays dispel the darkness of ignorance. She wears neither jewels nor bright colours. The white saree she wears reflects her essential purity, her rejection of all that is base and materialistic. She transcends the craving of the flesh, and rejoices in the powers of the mind. She is the patron of pure wisdom. Four Vedas, the books of universal knowledge, were her progeny. Her mount, the swan personifies pure knowledge and her herald, the peacock is a symbol of the arts. In Vaivarta Purana, Vishnu is said to have three wives: Lakshmi, Ganga, and Saraswati. They constantly quarrelled with one another. Finding it difficult for them to live together, Vishnu kept Lakshmi for himself; gave away Ganga to Shiva and Saraswati to Brahma. Thus, she is considered Brahma's consort. Also, there is one more store. In the beginning, there was chaos. To see the formless fluid, Brahma wondered, "How do I bring order into the void?"....."With Heralded by a peacock, she had sacred books in one hand and the veena (the lute) in the other. Clad in a white saree, Saraswati emerged from Brahma's mouth. Thus, she was born of Brahma. It was under her tutelage that Brahma acquired the ability to sense, to comprehend, to think and to communicate. The confused Brahma could look into the chaos with the eyes of wisdom now and see the beautiful potential that lay therein. Further, he was able to feel the melody of mantras (sacred verses) in the cacophony of chaos. In joy, he called her Vagdevi, (the patron goddess of music and elocutionary art). The sound of mantras filled the universe with prana (vital energy) and objects of various kinds began assuming shape. Thus, the universe acquired a concrete form. Saraswati was Brahma's daughter. However, Brahma began to look upon her with lustful eyes. She turned away saying, "All that I offer must be utilized to raise the spirit, not to debase it."However, Brahma could not contain his lustful heart and infatuation for the lovely goddess. She turned away from him, acquiring forms of various female animals. Brahma kept chasing her as the corresponding male equivalent, though could not win her favour. Angered by his display of the unbridled passion, Saraswati cursed Brahma,"You have corrupted the world with foul desires, the seeds of unhappiness. You have fettered the soul in flesh. You are not worthy of reverence. May not so many temples are constructed and a festival held in your name!" Her curse turned to be true. There are only two temples of Brahma in India; one at Pushkar, Rajasthan and the other in Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu.

2.1 Lord Shiva:

Shiva is the destroyer of the world. Brahma creates, Vishnu maintains and Shiva annihilates. Thus, the cycle of creation and destruction perpetually goes on. Shiva has his abode on the Mount Kailas. He site on the aasan (a kind of mat which one spreads on ground and sits upon it while meditating) of tiger skin in a meditative pose against the white background of the snow-capped Himalaya. Shiva never adorns his body like Vishun and Brahma. He is often seen unclad and his body smeared with ashes. He wears either a rosary of dry skulls or a necklace of kin cobra. This kind of posture of his symbolizes a perfect poise and inner harmony, experienced by a bhakta (one who is engaged in devotional meditation. He is rooted in the consciousness of the Supreme. Nothing disturbs him. The vicissitudes of nature, the challenges of life, the trials, and tribulations of the terrestrial world do not affect him at all. He maintains perfect serenity, equanimity, and tranquillity in every circumstance and all environments. Shiva is said to have a third eye, known as the gyan chakshu (the eye of wisdom and knowledge). The vision of this eye reaches beyond the vision of two mortal eyes. Hence, Shiva has a divine vision of reality. It transcends the limitations of the body, mind, and intellect; and helps you gain realization of your inner self. Shiva rides on Nandi (the bull) and carries several names. One of his names is Neelkantha (the blue-throated). He acquired this name after drinking poison for the good of the world. As the story goes in the scriptures, the gods and the demons churned the ocean to obtain nectar from it. The churning was going on. Suddenly, Halaahal (the poison) appeared on the surface. Soon, it began to spread in all directions, taking away the lives on earth and the ocean. Led by Prajapati, the oppressed humankind approached Shiva and urged him to rescue them from the deadly poison. Shiva, taking pity upon them, took the poison on to his palm and gulped it down the throat. The throat turned bulish under its effect. Hence, he became Neelkantha.n He is also known as Har, Shankar, Ashutosh, Jagdish, Ardhanarishwara, Shambhu, Mrityun-jaya,andGangadhar.Gangadhar means 'the bearer of the holy river Ganga' and Mrityunjaya- 'the victor of death'. River Ganga originates from his jataa (long knotted hair). Shiva's Ardhanarishwara form manifests the male and female combined in one body. At the time of creation, Brahma, the primitive father took nature out of one side half of his body and filled it with his creations. Hence, it is symbolic of the inseparable relationship of the primitive father and the kind, compassionate nature (the mother). The Lord is the manifestation of bliss on the one hand, and the fusion of the firm and the fickle on the other. His firmness represents the maternal form and the fickle represents the paternal one. A body, where the two forms are harmoniously combined, is symbolic of the state of bliss. With the firm and the fickle, the state of supreme bliss is visible only in Shiva's Ardhnarishwara form, the best of all his avateras. Often, he is shown with trishool (trident) and damroo (tabor) in his hands. The trishool is a three – pronged weapon. It is symbolic of the destruction of ego. Shiva holds victory over ego, attaining the state of perfection.

Shiva is good at dance, perhaps alone in the pantheon of Hindu gods. Bharat Muni has extensively discussed various styles of dance, about 108 in number in his Natyashastra (a treatise on the art of dance). He is often presented dancing in a merry mood, sometimes in the company of his followers. His taanday (a dance full of frenzy and madness) is the dance of shamshaan (crematorium). He is seen with his long hair scattered and spread, the cobra around his neck thrashing out poison in big amounts, the third eye wide open, the Ganga on the left, and the moon on the right side over his head. Shiva executes the tasks of creation and destruction through this dance. When the life is in peril, Hindus worship Shiva and try to win his favour and blessing through the continuous recitation of mahamrityunjaya mantra to get rid of the crisis. Hindus celebrate the festival of Shivratri. It falls on the fourteenth of the first half of Falgun (the last of the Hindu lunar months, usually falling in February and is supposed to be the birthday of Lord Shiva. Hindus offer mostly the simple flowers or leaves of the strong, intoxicating plants such as belladonna (deadly nightshade), aak (Calotropic procera), and beelva (Aegle marmelos) as the sacred offerings on to Shivalingam (the phallus image of Shiva). They also bathe the image with milk, water, honey, sugar, curd, and ghee (clarified butter). Women seek his blessing for a good and handsome and healthy husband, while men for an easy and smooth life. Shiva had many incarnations so far. Chief among them are: Nandishvara avatara, Kaal Bhairav avatara, Yaksha avatara. Durvasa avatara, Pipplaada avatara, Dwijreshwara avatara, Ardhnarishvara avatara, Kirat avatara, Avdheshvara avatara and Rudra avatara.

2.2 Goddess Parvati:

Parvati is the consort of Shiva. She had twice been the wife of Shiva. In her first life, she was the daughter of Prajapati (king) Daksha (the psychic son of Brahma), and was known as Sati. Shiva and Sati lived on Mount Kailas, the abode of Shiva atop the Himalaya. Her father Daksha became the chief of Prajapatis. Hence, he organized a yajna (a religious rite whereat ghee, barley, sesame and other sacred things are offered into the pyre with recitation of mantras). He invited all the gods worthy of participating in a yajna. But he did not invite Shiva, considering him a nasty and ugly soul. Sati, when knew of the father's yajna, proposed to Shiva that they should also attend it. But Shiva refused, pleading that they should not go without any invitation. He also told her that as Daksha had unfriendly feelings towards him, he would not welcome his (Shiva's) presence there. Sati pleaded that what he said and thought about her father was not true. Hence, she would like to go and confirm it for herself. Shiva, seeing no option, allowed her to go under the escort of his attendants. She reached her father's home. But when the father saw her come uninvited, he greatly insulted her. Feeling guilty and remorseful at her husband's defiance, she jumped into the vanja pyre and ended her life, wishing to be the wife of Shiva again. In the next life, she was born to Himachal (the mountain king Himalaya) as his daughter. Being born of a parvat or a giri (mountain), she was named Parvati (also Girija). She came of age and was fit to marry. As the parents were discussing the matter, she boldly declared that she would wed none else but Shiva. However, due to her earlier betrayal, Shiva was not going to agree. To persuade him through her love and devotion, she undertook a self-penance for thousands of years. At last, Shiva's heart melted. He agreed and accepted her as his wife. Parvati is also called Uma and Gauri. She is the creative force, the force of motherhood. Unmarried girls in Hindu families, especially in Rajasthan, worship the goddess to please her through devotion and seek her favour and blessing for a handsome and virtuous husband. The married ones pray for the husband's longevity and a happy, joyful, and comfortable

The women perform a special pooja (ritualistic worship) with this view. The pooja begins on Dhulandi, (the festival of colours), falling on the next day of Holi. The pooja continues for some eighteen days and ends on the third of the Chaitra (the first of Hindu lunar months) moon. Every morning, women and unmarried young girls assemble in the house of a newly married girl. Singing the glory of Gauri, they pray the goddess to grant their wishes. After the long spell of pooja, on the third of the moon in Chaitra, they celebrate the festival of Gangaur. This day being the last day of the pooja ritual, first they worship the image of the goddess, offering flowers and various kinds of sweets on to them. Then the well-adorned image is taken around the city into a procession. Finally, they are immersed into the holy waters of wells, rivers, or ponds as is the practice and belief.

3.1 Lord Vishnu:

Vishnu is another major god of Hindus. In Indian mythology, he is regarded as the preserver and the sustainers of life and universe. He is the saviour and the protector of humanity. That is why Vishnu, compared to other gods, has taken avataras in the maximum number. When a soul is facing threat to his life and craves for the help and protection of God, Lord Vishnu at once appears and saves him from the danger. Vishnu has so far taken twenty-four incarnations. Chronologically, they are: 1. Shri Sanakaadi 2.Varah 3.Devrishi Narad 4.Nar and Narayan 5.Kapil Muni 6.Dattatreya 7. Yajna 8. Rishabdev 9. Prithu 10.Matsya 11. Kurma 12.Dhanvantri 13.Shri Mohini 14. Narsimha 15. Vaaman 16.Hayagreeva 17. Appeared to Bless Dhruva and Save the Elephant 18. Parashuram 19. Vyasa 20.Hansa 21.Shri Ram 22. Balram and Krishna 23. Buddha and 24.Kalki. Lord Vishnu's image is usually presented as bluish or dark complexioned, resting on the bed of Shesha, the snake on the ocean; his wife Goddess Lakshmi fondly presses his feet, a lotus grown from his naval and Lord Brahma sitting atop the flower. He is often shown with four arms. He holds a lotus flower in one hand, a conch in another, the chakra (his disc) in the third, and a mace in the fourth. The petals of lotus are believed to symbolize the source of all existence, while the disc and the maces are the prized rewards, he got after defeating Indra. Lord Vishnu is said to possess a special bow called Saranga too. His wife Goddess of beauty and fortune, Vishnu rides an elephant, or a huge creature, half bird and half man; called Garuda, his abode is Vaikuntha (heaven). Vishnu bears a thousand names, the recitation of which grants one relief and salvation.

3.2 Lakshmi:

Draped in a red saree, bedecked with gold ornaments, seated on a lotus flower, holding pot in one hand, lotus flower in the other, gold coins in the next two, flanked by white elephants, such an image of goddess Lakshmi adorns most of the hindu homes and business establishments. Lakshmi is the goddess of fortune, power, luxury, beauty, fertility, and auspiciousness. She holds the promise of material fulfilment and contentment. She has several names as Ramaa, Shri etc. Shri is the most sacred name of Lakshmi. Considering it aus-

picious, the Hindus write the word 'Shri' atop the letters of correspondence, whether it is a business letter or a personal one. They also use it as an honorific while addressing a respectable person such as a teacher or a holy man. Lakshmi is the consort of Vishnu. There are several stories of her birth and life. According to one story, once, maharishi Durvasa was on his journey of the earth. While walking through a forest, he saw beautiful a lass with a garland of parijaat (a tree in heaven) flowers in her hands. The rishi (sage) asked her to gift the garland to him. She did it. In the mean time, he saw Lord Indra (the king of gods), mounted on his Airavat (the elephant), coming towards him. When Indra came quite near, the rishi offered the garland to him as a gesture of respect. He took it and threw it on to the head of elephant. The elephant, lifting it up with the trunk, threw it away onto the ground. The rishi took it as his insult and cursed Indra that he would soon be deprived of power and prosperity. The rishi's curse turned true and Indra lost all power and prosperity. The poor and lustreless Indra with other gods approached Brahma for a remedy. Brahma told them that Vishnu alone could help them in the matter. Hence, they should worship and pray him for the help. The gods began the worship of Vishnu and soon satisfied him through their devotion. Vishnu appeared before them and advised them to churn ksheera Sagar (the ocean of milk) for getting nectar, as the use of nectar alone could restore their earlier status. The gods and the demons churned the ocean. At the end, they found fourteen ratnas (most precious gifts), Lakshmi being one of them. Since Lakshmi is the seat of Lord Vishnu, she is often seen, sitting by fondly pressing his feet.

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