



FOLK ART, AN EXPRESSION OF RAJASTHANI VALUES IN THE PRACTISE OF JOSHI'S PHAD

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Abstract

Indian artists have developed and evolved various art forms, techniques, material and medium since thousands of years. Every State in India shows a variety of art forms produced by certain communities. These art forms signify customs, ritual practices, habits and ceremonies continued in the society from one generation to another through folk art in written materials, art forms or oral narration.

Folk art is an ornamentation which is embellishing our cultural and artistic legacy. With the use of vibrant and natural colors, clothes, mud wall, etc. this art form becomes very attractive, eye-catching and gives visual pleasure. The most famous types of Indian folk art paintings include Phad, Orissa Paata, Madhubani, Kalamkari, Warli paintings, Tanjore paintings, Gond art, etc.

Phad is a beautiful, vivacious form of folk art of Rajasthan which is now acknowledged on a global scale. The principal subject for the paintings is the life of their legendary Hero of Rajasthan 'Pabuji' and 'Devnarayanaji'. These paintings are characterized by their own unique styles and patterns in which the figures face each other rather facing the audience. Phad painting involves two groups of people, one is Chitera or the painter and the other is Bhopa or the narrator.

The Joshi family of Bhilwara district of Rajasthan is famous for this traditional folk art since the last two centuries. Nand Kishore Joshi, Shanti Lal Joshi, Prakash Joshi, Shree Lal Joshi and Kalayan Joshi are the notable artist of Phad painting in India. Among them Kalayan Joshi is one who has experimented with Phad painting by incorporating contemporary style (Collage) and line drawing in the same traditional stories.

This research paper will be focused on the contribution of Joshi Family in the development and glorification of this dying art as well as the cultural tradition of Rajasthan.

Key Words: Folk Art, Phad, Artist, Technique, Material and Medium, Cultural Tradition, Narration.

Introduction

Phad is a beautiful, unique style of traditional Rajasthani Folk art on a long horizontal piece of cloth which is approximately 700 years old which is now well known on a global scale. It is an art linked to the lively tradition of storytelling, music and performance achieved through specific style of representation. The word 'Phad' was derived from the Hindi word 'Pad', which means to *read* or *kathan-wachan*. It is possibly derived from the Sanskrit word 'Patt'.ⁱ These paintings form a background to the epic stories of the local deities and legends of erstwhile local rulers which are often carried from place to place and are accompanied by traditional singers, who narrate the theme depicted on the scrolls.

It is a hereditary art form, which is passed on from father to son and practised by the professional painters of the Chipa caste known by the clan name 'Josi'. Their expertise is in textile-printing and they operate from their traditional towns of Shahpura and Bhilwara in Bhilwara district of Rajasthan.ⁱⁱ

Phad painting involves two groups of people, one is Chitera or the painter and the other is Bhopa or the narrator who explains the nuances of each scene. They both are interdependent for the preparation of the Phad, as Bhopa provides the subject matter while the Chitera is responsible for the technical aspect of the painting with the fixed images, characters and also the colours. This makes it easier for the Bhopas to identify the characters in the composition.

Bhopas commission these paintings for religious purpose which functions as a 'portable temple' and also carry the Phad traditionally on the invitation of villagers to perform in their localities during sickness and misfortune. The Bhopa are usually of Nayak or Bhil tribe who performs the epic with the help of his wife -Bhopi, carrying a spotlight in her hand.ⁱⁱⁱ They are unrolled only after sunset when it is dark as it is an all-night performance. Before the narration begins, both the performers and the attendee give ritual offerings to the images of the hero Gods. While performing, the bhopa plays the ravanahatta^{iv}, a string instrument and wears a red Baga (skrit), Safa (turban) and ties ghungrus (anklets with bells) to ankles. They perform all the year round except in rainy season when the deities are supposed in the slumber.^v



Plate 1: Bhopa Narrating the Epic Story of Pabuji along with Bhopi

As it is believed that the deity resides in the Phad, so special rituals are also performed in order to dispose of the torn and old paintings. They are taken by the Bhopas to the holy lake at Pushkar for immersion and this process is known as 'ThandiKarna'.^{vi} But now with the gaining popularity in India and Abroad, this practise has been virtually abandoned to provide new life to this folk art. Now a days this form of art is even painted on small piece of canvas known as 'Tukras' on popular demand, where sometimes only one figure is highlighted. Even the themes are not restricted to mythological and historical events.^{vii}

Subjects of Phad Paintings

Phad displays the heroic deeds of many Rajput warriors and they are generally of five kinds namely; Pabuji, Devnarayanji, Krishna, Ramdal (Ramayana) and Ramdevji.^{viii} Among these the most legendary and popular is 'Pabuji', who is considered as Demi God in Marwar, even today. It shows an entire sequence of events from his birth to death, has crowded scenes and innumerable figures full of movement. The Devnarayan Phad is equally popular and has religious appeal. The phads of Pabuji are normally about 15 feet in length, while the phads of Devnarayan are normally about 30 feet long.

Pabuji Ki Phad is a scroll painting of folk deity, Pabuji – the Rathod Rajput chief of Rajasthan in the 14th century, who is extolled as an incarnation of Hindu God, and worshipped as "the Ascetic Deity of Sand Desert" by the Rabari tribes of Rajasthan.^{ix}

The Phad represents the court of Pabuji, his palace and his divine character. The images in the painting are logically arranged around the central outsized figure of Pabuji, his magnificent black mare, kesarkalami and to his right is his court with his four principal companions. On the left of main deity is the court of Buro, his brother; at the extreme left is Umarkot and Lanka is at the left edge. To the right of Pabuji's court is the court of the Lady Deval (goddess of Kolu). At the far right of the painting is Khici's court. The blank spaces in between are depicted with scenes of Pabuji's journey from Rajasthan to Umarkot. While the images of Ganesh, Sarasvati and Vishnu in different incarnations are painted at the top of the Phad. The depictions shows a "panorama of medieval Rajasthan: women, horses, peacocks, carts, archers, battles, washermen and fishermen, kings and queens, huge grey elephants and herds of white cows and buff camels, many-armed demons, fish-tailed wonder-creatures and blue-skinned gods.^x



Plate 2: PabujikiPhad

Devnarayanjiki Phad is another narrative painting related to the folk hero of Rajasthan, Devnarayan, a Gujar warrior. He was a historical figure of ninth century (born on 911AD) and worshiped as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. His legendary epic was written much earlier to that of Pabhuji. He is popular among the Gurjar community as their special deity. Both men and women attend the performances. However, the women of the community identify Devnarayan in the form of Lord Krishna and sing songs outside of the ritual on the episodes related to baby Krishna.^{xi}



Plate 3: DevnarayanjikiPhad



Another type of phad that has now been abandoned was that of Goddess Kali. It was distinctively different from the others, as it was done in the Batik style and painted for a particular untouchable caste of Bhopa.^{xii}

Process of Preparing Phad

The artist begins the Phad painting on an auspicious day according to the Panchang with the ritual offering of a coconut to Sarasvati. The first stroke in the painting is always made by a virgin girl belonging either to the painter's family or to a higher caste by making "Satiya" on the cloth with yellow color. This ritual method is known as "Chanka". The painter then divides the entire scroll into a number of sections and sub-sections and prepares rough sketch of the whole painting in light yellow color. This is called "Kachilikhai Karna". When the rough sketch is ready, artist applies colours in layer pattern from lighter to darker value. This process is called "Rang Lagana". The forceful linear expressions becomes lively after "Shyahikadhana" (application of black colour) which gives the final touch to the Phad painting.^{xiii} The composition is in a very systematic manner as the main image is drawn bigger in the centre and other images are balanced in its ratio. Another interesting aspect of this folk art is that all the figures are side posed and face each other; rather facing the audience. They even share the same features like, round face, short and broad nose, big eyes, broad head, double chin and bent thin moustache. On a promising day the painter completes the painting by making the 'Eye Ball' which is the last step and now it is ready for worship. The artist sings in the central part of the scroll where the largest figure of Devnarayan or Pabuji is painted.



Plate 4: Kachilikhaikarna



Plate 5: Rang Lagana



Plate 6: Shyahikadhana

Contribution of the Joshi Family

The Joshi family originated from Pur, a village near Bhilwara district of Rajasthan. Many generations ago their ancestors migrated to Shahpura state founded in 1631 AD.^{xiv} There they painted scenes on the walls and ritual art for the king and local patrons and also produced Phads for singers. They were also considered as the soul keepers of the art of Phad painting.

Nand Kishore Joshi, Shanti Lal Joshi, Prakash Joshi, Shree Lal Joshi and Kalayan Joshi are the notable artist of this art form. Among them, Shree Lal Joshi and Shanti Lal Joshi are the leading artists who are known for their innovations and creativity. Besides them, Kalyan Joshi and Gopal Joshi; son of Padam Shri Shree Shrilal Joshi are the artists who brought new approach to Phad Paintings. They have created many paintings in the form of historical, religious, contemporary Art and experimented by incorporating collage and line drawing in the same traditional stories.^{xv}

Shri NandKishor Joshi

Shri NandKishor Joshi is one of the leading Phad painters among other artists of Joshi lineage of Chhipa caste. He was awarded with the District Award in the year 1989. His sons Prakash Joshi and Mukut Joshi are also creative artists and successfully following the traditional family routes with modern approach.

Shri Shree Lal Joshi

Padam Shree and Shilp Guru awardee Shri Shree Lal Joshi was born on 5th March, 1931 in a Art-family. His father Ramchandra Joshi initiated him at the age of 13 to start taking knowledge about Phad painting.^{xvi}

He worked as a commercial artist, making hoarding, writing banner, painting sign board, etc. However, he is also a versatile and renowned Phad painter among all his fellow painters as he has a rich experience of around six decades in different painting styles of Rajasthan. He is credited with reviving this colourful art by discovering many new techniques and painting



them in quite original and meaningful compositions. To begin with his experiments he introduced and composed small size of Phad paintings with a new subject in traditional art form like, Maharana Pratap, Prithvi Raj Chauhan, Geet Govind, Haldi Ghati, Rani Hadi, Amar Singh Rathore, Dhola Maru, Nal Damyanti, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Buddha & Mahaveera, Kumar Sambhava, etc. Besides Phad, he is also known for wall paintings.^{xvii}

He founded Chitrashala in 1960.^{xviii} It is a pioneering institute for training aspiring artists from communities other than the Phad artist community-in different painting style of Rajasthan where more than 2000 students & many research scholars have been skilled so far. Among them many of them are working professionally and have achieved many national and international honours with prestigious awards. One of them is Pradeep Mujherjee, a Bengali artist, learnt this art form in 1970s under the guru-shishyaparampara and won the National Award in 1985. Rameshwar Singh of Jaipur also learnt this style and later devised his own unique style, using modern touches to enhance Phad art.^{xix}

Shri Shree Lal Joshi also guided both his sons Kalyan Joshi and Gopal Joshi in adding new dimensions to this traditional art. For his outstanding efforts, he has received many National and International Awards. He has been honoured with the National Merit Award in 1969, 1972 and 1974; the National Award in 1984; the Padma Shri in 2006 and the Shilp Guru Award in 2007. He has received a number of International Awards, such as a prestigious SAARC International Award in Islamabad and the Black Magician Award at the German festival in Stuttgart. The Government of India has issued a postal stamp featuring his famous painting, the Phad of Shri Devnarayan.^{xx}

Mukut Joshi

He has been taught Phad Paintings by his father and Guru Shree NandKishorJi Joshi since his childhood.

Prakash Joshi

He has learnt Phad painting from his Guru & father Shri Nand Kishor Joshi. He started learning when he was just 11 year old. Apart from this he also learnt miniature paintings. He introduced fine miniature form to Phad paintings and developed it as his style. In 1998 he started teaching the traditional Phad style of mythology-based painting to youngsters at Chitrashala, to keep this dying art alive. He even does not allow students to use an eraser to make them more alert and perfect.

He was awarded the District Award and the State Award in 98, State Merit Award at 1999, National Merit Award at 2008, National Award (President Award) at 2009, and the Kala Mani Award in 2010.^{xxi}

Gopal Joshi

Gopal Joshi, a Phad painter learnt this technique under the guidance of his guru and father Shree Lal Joshi. He started learning at an early age firstly by making borders with his father. He is known for minute work in his paintings. Later he taught this art to his students and believes that every artist or student develops this in according their style in different ways. For this art he has been awarded with Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya Award, 1990, State Award, 2003-04 and National Merit Award, 2006.^{xxii}

Kalyan Joshi

Kalyan Joshi was born in 1969 in Bhilwara and learnt to draw and paint at the age of eight from his illustrious father, Padma Shri Shree Lal Joshi, inspite of this he did his graduation in Commerce stream.^{xxiii}

In his childhood, Phads were painted by members of their community only, but his father took the bold step of teaching this interesting art to students outside the chipa community. He also followed his father's footsteps and created awareness about the tradition and to motivate upcoming artists of Rajasthan he set up "Ankan Art Group" in 1994 which offered them an opportunity to develop their potential.^{xxiv}



Plate 7: "Lord Krishna with Gopinis" –Small sized phad painting



Plate 8: Postal Stamp featuring Phad painting by Shree Lal Joshi



During his creation journey, Kalyan Joshi was highly inspired by the Jain miniature paintings and the Comic books which helped him in incorporating text along with the images in same mythological narrative paintings. Along with this, while struggling to portray multiple images in small format, he choose to explore the collage technique to layer the multiple narratives. In collage he also represented the flora and fauna which he studied from the miniatures of the Mewar School. This style emerged as a unique form of Phad painting.

Besides the colourful representation of the mythological and historical events, he has experimented with various medium, styles and subjects. Along with this, he created Black & White compositions in two ways. In the first style, he has painted with white outlines on black background. While in the second style he painted horn of cows, water and figure with black outline. The main paintings of this style are Group of Cows, Forest, DurgaGangour, Group of Elephants, Hanuman Chalisa, Narikunjar, Tiger vs Elephant, Airawat.

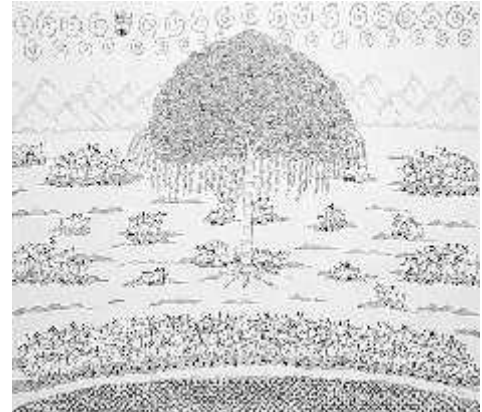


Plate 9: "Cows in Jungle" Black & White

He even painted the life of historical and contemporary icons from Prithviraj Chauhan and Maharana Pratap to Mahatma Gandhi and Amitabh Bachchan. He has also depicted celebrated poems like Geeta Govind and Madhushala in Phad format.

His paintings represent a complex and full-blown folk epic narrative, which achieved through a very specific style of representation and filled with figures and pictorial incidents.

Conclusion

Phad is the depiction of Rajasthani culture that has developed within the society, by the society, for the society. Earlier it was used only by the Bhopas for the ritual and religious purpose, but now it has emerged as a unique art form which carries the cultural essence of the tradition along with contemporary ideas that provides livelihood to the artists.

In previous days, this folk art was restricted within the men of chipa community and they not even taught their daughters because they believed that the secret of this art may pass on to another family. But now with the modernity in thoughts and to promote this dying art, the Bhilwara artists are training people from other communities and even the females in the same old pattern, i.e., the age of the student should be 15 years and above and should have knowledge of human anatomy.

The format and dimensions of the painting has also changed from large scrolls to small sized paintings with the increasing market demand. But in these small compositions the style of the forms, colour scheme and their arrangements are still in the traditional manner. The subject is no more restricted only to the mythological and historical events but to the contemporary life also. Along with colourful compositions, Kalyan Joshi has developed black & white compositions and also incorporated collage with the traditional arrangement. This added a new dimension to the folk art of Rajasthan.

Presently, in order to promote this art form, the Joshi family artists are now organizing camps, workshops and demonstrations at Universities and Colleges. Thus, their efforts have popularized this folk art among other people of the society in India as well as at international level.

Phad Paintings (Traditional and Contemporary)



Plate 10: Story of Pabuji



Plate 11: "Marriage of Pabuji



Plate 12: Ramayana



Plate 13: "Ram LalakiPhad



Plate 14: Krishna Lila



Plate 15: DurgaSaptashati



Plate 16: Small sized phad painting



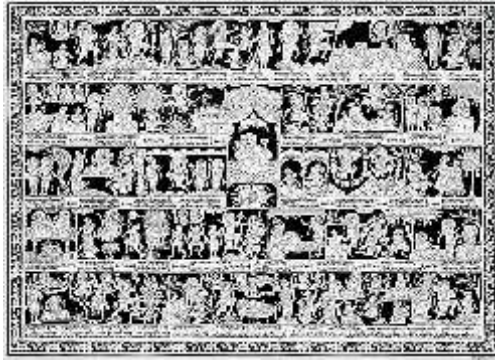


Plate 17: Hanuman Chalisa

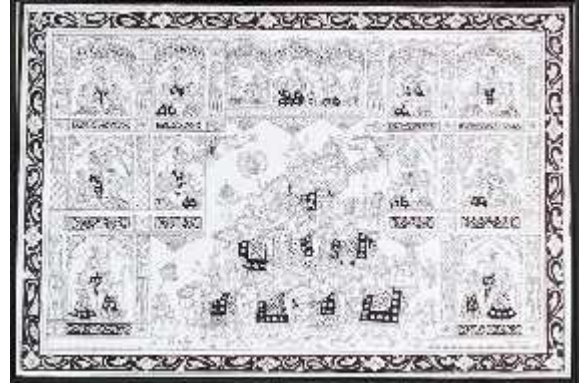


Plate 18: King being welcomed to the Palace



Plate 19: "Radha - Krishna", Collage



Plate 20: Wedding invite design with Phad images



Plate 21: "Welcome", Collage

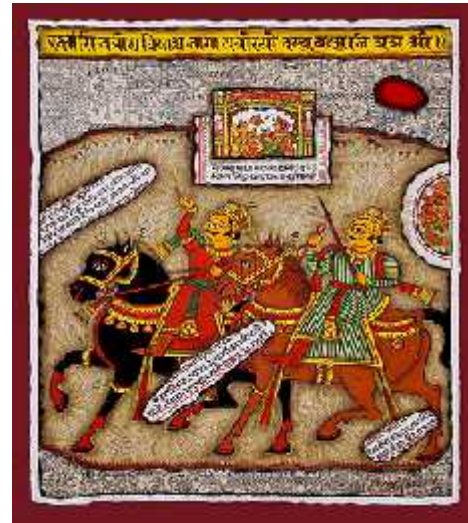


Plate 22: "Two Soldiers", Collage

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