

SVETOSLAV ROERICH.

The vast, fascinating and complex subject of Indian Painting could hardly be discussed within the short space of a few pages.

The systematic study of the subject is only of comparatively recent date and a great deal of data will yet come to light to enrich our knowledge and explain and fill many of the existing gaps.

When one contemplates the brilliant and rich mosaic of Indian Art, as a whole, one becomes aware that what we can clearly define and what strikes us most are the *Highlights, The* efflorescences and upsurges stimulated by a variety and multitude of influences and circumstances, some extraneous and some local or both. But underlying these upsurges there flows and always flowed uninterrupted in one form or another the vast river of Indian creative expression, feeding at the recurrent tributaries, but constituting the undying tradition and expression of the Indian creative genius and cumulative artistic experience.

Painting in India must have existed in one form or another long before the so called Ajanta cycle and judging by the examples of sculpture and other objects of art as well as from the texts that have come down to us, must have reached a very considerable plane of development at a very early date. Drawing, Painting, Design and Sculpture usually co-exist, but Painting, being the more perishable records ^{is} are usually lost, especially in countries with extreme climatic conditions.

The beautiful objects of art of the so called Indus Valley Civilisation bespeak of an advanced level of Design, if we can judge from the many objects found and especially the beautiful seals which show an integrated and distinct style and a sense of Design of considerable technical excellence.

The type of painting which might have been practised then must remain a conjecture and we must turn to surviving examples to begin any scientific ^ustudy of Indian Painting as it has come down to our days.

Briefly and in a general way only we can classify the known styles and schools into about half a dozen major groups with a large number of inter-related ramifications all leading upto the modern Indian Schools of Painting.

*

1. The style of Painting which survived in the Cave Temples as Frescoes of which the most famous are the Ajanta and Ellora Cave sequences. Beginning about the first Century B.C. they go upto to about the Seventh Century in the case of Ajanta and right up to the close of the first millenium at Ellora. Other examples of the School which must have spread throughout India are to be found at Bagh, Sittanavassal and in Ceylon. These Cave sequences especially Ajanta preserve for us a priceless record of the development of painting in India over a period of many centuries and the standards it had reached during ^{this} the golden age. Reaching its zenith about the 5th century or so it gradually declined and the change in style and treatment became especially noticeable in the later Jain ^{STYLE} paintings at Ellora. These changes were conformant to the rapidly changing pattern of life both political and otherwise.

*

2. The illuminated Buddhist Palm Leaf Manuscripts and the Jain Texts which range from about the 10th to the 12th or 13th century in the case of the Buddhist Manuscripts and extend to considerably later dates with the Jain Manuscripts. They were in direct line of evolution from the great tradition as we have

ramifications all leading upto the modern Indian Schools of Painting.

*

1. The style of Painting which survived in the Cave Temples as Frescoes of which the most famous are the Ajanta and Ellora Cave sequences. Beginning about the first century B.C. they go upto to about the seventh century in the case of Ajanta and right up to the close of the first millenium at Ellora. Other examples of the School which must have spread throughout India are to be found at Bagh, Sittanavassal and in Ceylon. These Cave sequences especially Ajanta preserve for us a priceless record of the development of painting in India over a period of many centuries and the standards it had reached during this golden age. Reaching its zenith about the 5th^{or sixth} century ~~or so~~ ^{began to change} it gradually ~~evolved~~ ^{Evolution of the} and the ~~change in~~ style and treatment became especially noticeable in the later Jain style at Ellora. These changes were conformant to the rapidly changing pattern of life both political and otherwise.

*

2. The illuminated Buddhist Palm Leaf Manuscripts and the Jain Texts which range from about the 10th to

* Important Examples of this
school can be seen ~~at~~ ⁱⁿ the
~~temple~~ ^{11th century} in the Murals of the
Brihadishwara Temple
at Tanjore. →

the 12th or 13th century in the case of the Buddhist Manuscripts and extend to considerably later dates with the Jain Manuscripts. They were in direct line of evolution from the great tradition as we have found it in the Cave Temple paintings and the beautiful Palm Leaf illuminations from Bengal, Bihar and Nepal often exhibit striking similarity in technique and treatment, to the murals at Ajanta. The Jain miniatures are likewise a continuation of this great tradition, but exhibit the specific angular, wiry, linear technique with flat colour surfaces which became such a distinct feature of Jain art. This art reached its greatest development in Gujerat and Western India and in turn influenced other Schools.

*

3. The complex art pattern which grew up in the South and the Deccan fed by the great earlier traditions and extended as far as the Eastern Coast. It reached a sort of culmination in Vijayanagar and though Vijayanagar is often considered as an already decadent expression yet such murals as in ~~Lepakshi~~ ^{the VIRABHADRA} Temple ^{ATLEPAKSHI} bespeak of a well integrated tradition, highly decorative and distinct in the general approach. The emergence of what is often referred to as the Deccan School

found it in the Cave Temple Paintings and the Beautiful Palm Leaf illuminations from Bengal, Bihar and Nepal often exhibit striking similarity in technique and treatment, to the ^mMurals at Ajanta. The Jain miniatures are likewise a continuation of the ^{the great tradition} style found at Ellora, ~~but~~ exhibit the specific angular, wiry, linear, technique with flat colour surfaces ^{which} which became such a distinct feature of Jain art. This art reached its greatest development in Gujerat and Western India and in turn influenced other Schools.



3. The complex art pattern which grew up in the South and the Deccan fed by the great earlier traditions

~~it found its culmination in the Vijayanagar style and~~ ^{EXTENDED} spread towards the Eastern Coast, ^{and EVEN} ~~Though the art of~~ ^{in Vijayanagar} ~~Vijayanagar may be considered as an already decadent expression yet such murals as in Lepakshi~~ ^{the Temple} bespeak of a well integrated tradition, highly decorative and distinct in the general approach. ^{what is often referred to as the} ~~The emergence of the~~ Deccan School coincides with the advent of powerful Muslim influences which were apparently quite formed ^{by} the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th centuries, as we can see from the few examples which have recently come to light. These new influences fused with the remnants of the Southern styles and formed the ^{so-called} ~~so-called~~ Bijapur and other Schools in the Deccan by the last half of the 16th century.



4. The Moghul School, which was a great revival, a vital blend of Indo-Persian and European Influences began with the advent of the Moghul Rule.

The initial impulse may have come as it has often happened ~~before~~ in the past from outside, in this case from the great Persian Artists of the School of Bihzad ^{and} ~~of~~ the Moghul Court, but the Indian creative genius very soon blended and transmuted these new influences and

the Patronage



absorbing the new lessons gained from European art which ^{in increasing numbers} was ~~then~~ brought to India developed a new and vital form of expression. The Moghul School is characterised by splendid drawing, a new decorative and striking realism, perspective, receding planes, atmosphere as well as a great sense of observation. Series of large paintings were ^{executed} produced, as well as books illustrated. Miniatures ^{depicting} illustrating court life were most popular and exquisite studies of flowers and animals appeared during the time of Jehanghir. Artists were given a new status and miniatures ^{were} ~~began to be~~ signed by the Artists. The school reached its zenith under Akbar and Jehanghir and gradually lost its vitality and standards with the last Moghul Rulers.



5. The so called Rajput School of art which must have existed even at an earlier date than the examples which we now possess indicate, covers a large geographic area. The school in its initial stages displayed extraordinary vigour, blended with an advanced sense of the ^{or} Decorative, as well as a great knowledge of the elements of pure composition and formal treatment. These so called primitives are mural in their general treatment and often gems of decorative splendour. The themes used were usually illustrations to musical modes, Ragmalas, popular poems and epic romances. The Krishna Legend acquired a dominant place.

The earliest known examples go back to the end of the 16th century and continued through the ^{and even 18th} 17th century gradually losing their ^{originality and} original vitality. Udaipur in Mewar was a great centre of this art.

new phase

A later mixed Rajput - Moghul School which absorbed many elements of the Moghul Tradition which flourished at the Courts of the numerous Rajput Rulers and elsewhere in India during the 17th and 18th centuries and is responsible for a large number of paintings.



6.

The Himalayan or Kangra School which comprise^s all the known Hill Schools, beginning with the more primitive Bashali and Pahari Schools and culminating in the well known later Kangra style.

These schools have been developed during the end of the 17th and 18th centuries when the growing lack of patronage and disturbed conditions made many artists from down plains migrate to the Hills attracted by the new patronage and growing importance of the Hill States.

The beginning of this most important school cannot be at present factually traced^e beyond the end of the 17th century though personally, I am inclined to believe that some form of paintings must have been practiced in the Himalayan Hill Tracts from very early periods and some traditional schools and ateliers probably connected with the Temples must have been locally at work throughout. We know that Kashmir had some excellent artists who in the 11th and 12th centuries were invited to paint frescoes in the Western Tibetan Kingdom of Guge at Tsaparang and must have also contributed to the frescoes in the Temples^{of} at Spiti. These artists may have also worked in the areas lying between Western Tibet and Kashmir. Some of the landscapes depicted in these frescoes bear a strange similitude to the landscape treatment found in the so called Bashali^o paintings. The Kangra or Himalayan School of art with its numerous branches and ramifications through Kangra^p Proper, Nurpur, Guler, Chamba, Suket, Kulu, Sirmoor, Garhwal and other States has left to us a priceless record of a great tradition. This infinitely tender, decorative, fully integrated art which in its best examples must rank with some of the great treasures of the Art world, is indeed worthy of the beautiful legends they depicted and the ^{unique} great scenery and life which inspired them. The Kangra School came to an end by the middle of the 19th century though a few traditional artists survived

even at later dates.

The so called Sikh School is very closely allied to the Kangra School, and undoubtedly many of the later artists worked for the Sikh Rulers.

*

Before the emergence of what we must call the modern Indian School of Painting there was a general decline. Through the efforts of E. B. Havell and Abanindranath Tagore a new impulse was given to the study of the great classical tradition. A new school began to form and this revival was often referred to as the Bengal Renaissance. This movement opened the way to a new appreciation of the vast artistic heritage of India and awakened the new artistic life of the country.

new para

The modern trends in Indian art are necessarily very complex and it must take some time before a definite new style may be found, if indeed the word style is applicable to the modern tendencies of our life which lacks unified integration and tends toward individual expression.

In some way it may be a blessing in as much as it presents us a pattern of infinite variety like the sparkle and flash of a precious stone through the thousands of its facets. Yet, a measure of unity must come through the generalities of environment and experience.

It is ^{but} natural that ^{should have} European Modern Art had a marked influence on Modern Indian Painting, ^{yet} which some of the artists have ^{also} very successfully turned to folk art and themes. These tendencies and influences will no doubt be eventually transmuted into ^{Some} new approach ^{es} and will stimulate to new research and experiments when interpreting the fast changing scene of India's Life.

Large numbers of excellent and serious artists are now working towards new pictorial ^{expression} ~~conquests~~ and already exhibit highly individual approaches and consummate mastery of their mediums. Such excellent names as

Raj Chaudhary

Nandalal Bose, Jamini Roy, Manishi Day, ⁿ Besdre, Hebbar, Chavda, Raval, Palsikar, Samant and many others are all working towards new conquests, new achievements and are significantly contributing towards India's new expression and enriching the Treasure House of World Culture.

It is the duty of the Government and the public to give them every assistance and extend to them the facilities of a generous patronage. The Sacred Fire of Inspiration "feeds not well, unless it be first fed".

~~We know that~~ *Sacred* great art flourished wherever there was adequate patronage and support, and it is the ~~great task~~ *Sacred* of society to help the *National* genius to manifest itself.

Bangalore,
15-9-1958.

(S. Roerich)