

The so-called Pala manuscripts which have come down to us as early Bengali and Nepalese Buddhist scriptures are often illustrated with very remarkable miniatures usually corresponding to the text of the manuscript. Not many so far have come to light but we can definitely discern two schools, the so-called early Pala School which one finds in the Bengali manuscripts and the Nepali School which one finds in the manuscripts where the Lansa script is used. Lansa manuscripts approach somewhat the Western Guzerat tradition as we find it in the Jain manuscript. We find many characteristics which seem to indicate some sort of mutual influence. The other earlier manuscripts are of the purely Pala type and in these manuscripts the tradition of painting, the technique is very similar to the technique which was employed by the Gupta and post Gupta artists working in Ajanta and other cave temples. It is of great interest for us to trace those similarities which seem to indicate that the Gupta tradition travelled Eastward where it found its efflorescence in the Pala Art. From there it must have ~~gone~~ gone South and again Westwards towards the Himalayas and Western India. Thus we may, with some certainty, say that the same tradition prevailed and was living in different parts of India at different periods of Indian history. The Palm Leaf manuscripts afforded a wonderful example of this continuity of tradition. There are certain technical methods which would point to the same source and I have found not only in the design but in the actual technique application of certain colours, the same tradition which lived in Ajanta being made use of by the Pala artists.

My attention was drawn once to the very effective use of the pointilist method of applying glue and green pigment in some of the Palm Leaf miniatures where over a lighter field of glue dark blue dots would give a play of colour which was very striking and which bespoke, together with other colour applications, of a high degree of knowledge of colour effects. To confirm my ideas I took a trip to Ajanta to compare this technique to some of the techniques used in Ajanta and to my great delight found that the same pointilist technique in the case of blue pigment was used in Ajanta. Thus the shade, whenever a flat background was being made use of, the figures or the trees or whatever was made to stand out against it, was usually surrounded by a darker shade of the same hue as the background, but only more intense, which had the effect of bringing out the figures and giving them a greater relief. The method of painting trees, of painting rocks, was almost identical to the methods used by the

Ajanta artists

The Flat Ashoka tree with its beautiful flowers, beautiful foliage could be found illustrated in the manuscript in the same way as you found it in the cave frescoes, palm trees and banana trees, mangoes, pipal trees, both the Palmyra Palm and the Coconut Palm, the animals and the other characteristic method of painting rocks which were painted in a high stylised cubist form, reminiscent somewhat of some of the Byzantine rock treatment. In all cases the actual application of colour was filled in in flat surfaces and the outline was supplied later in free, beautiful flowing lines, the freedom of the drawing is quite evident because we find very often crossing lines which bespeak of a quick sweep of the brush which would overlap the crossing line. The foliage of the trees was likewise filled in later over a rough block in flat shape of a tree and it is interesting to note that this method seemed to survive and remain as the principal technique in later miniatures. The outlines were always filled in later and it was a continuance but gradual process which was well balanced and divided into consecutive stages, thus we probably had the rough blocking in of the surface into the corresponding rough shapes that were to be painted in and which were later filled with the flat foundation colours. When this was completed the outline followed with the details painted in, the outline being of different shades corresponding corresponding to the particular subject treated. Later the details are filled in and the colours painted and rounded and the finishing touches applied in gradual succession.

Like in the carefully worked out systems of the Old Masters as we find in the Italian Renaissance and used by the great Venetians and later inserted by other schools in Europe, the method was carefully classified into definite stages and we see that practically all the early great Masters of Europe had a very careful system which permitted them very rapid execution and freedom of technique which we without direct application of pigment have to some extent lost today. Thus if we take the method used by the great Venetians we find that first they would use a rough drawing which was done over a colour, usually reddish background from which they worked in light and shade in very simple, almost monotone colours, they would build up the light drawing perhaps leaving the dark portion of the background to come through whatever shade was needed. When this was completely dried, which necessitated a fairly long period

of waiting, they quickly covered these over^{poor}/in colour but very strong in contrasts surfaces with transparent glazes of various colours working them inover the light and dark surfaces mixing them and working them in one another and adding the details as they went along into the fresh glazes. This was a very quick method of work carefully planned and it permitted artists to work on a great many compositions at the same time as he had to give time for the pigment to dry before every successive operation. Of course it meant that the painting was completely worked out in the artist's mind and it was a continuous process since every retouching of this particular method would necessitate a complete retracing of ones steps starting again with the hand painting and finishing up with the glazes and details. This method in the West lasted well up to the 18th century. You find the great English artists like Renolds, Gainsborough, Lawrence, all using this method and only with Hogarth and Constable and perhaps Bonnington we find the change to the direct application of the pigment. The same came in France and other countries and after the great paintings of Watteau, Boucher, Lamprey and others there is a change over to the more direct method as found in the schools of De la Croix and Corbe. It is of great interest and perhaps significance that the truly great artists of whatever nation have always evolved more or less their own technique and in the West we can see the techniques of Rembrandt, Franz Hals, Velasquez, Titian and Dermeer all contributing to the existing tradition by their own discoveries, their own approach.

Here in India likewise we find individual artists, individual schools having developed their own characteristics and their own technique as a development and contribution to the existing tradition which was strong and survived, as we see, for long centuries.

Most of the Buddhist manuscripts are the texts of the Astasahasrika Prajnaparmita and the well illustrated texts of Ganda Vyuha Mahayana Sutra was discovered by me two years ago in different parts of the country and is as far as we know the only text existing of the Ganda Vyuha. It is an 11th century manuscript, beautifully illustrated, depicting the travellers of Sudama in search of wisdom. Some of the larger miniatures are very closely ressembling the Ajanta compositions and point to the same school and tradition with all the richness of colouring and accomplished technique. This particular manuscript contains about 120 miniatures and I believe some

are yet missing and I hope will turn up some day.

It seems that ^{not} ~~in~~ all the miniatures are by the same artist as some of them are of definite better style but the school is definitely the same as it makes use of identical details. These miniatures are all of very great importance from the point of view of the study of Indian painting and they definitely prove technical excellence of an earlier Gupta tradition still lives at a much later date.

Since we have with certainty established that Pala artists worked in the Kangra Valley and other Himalayan tracts as we have already mentioned, we can safely assume that the Pala painting tradition which was the foundation of the Guge school lived in Kangra and was in one way or another the foundation upon which some of the popular schools later developed.

It is of interest that I have definitely found certain characteristics in the treatment of trees as we find in the same of the so-called Basholi paintings present in the Pala miniatures and as I have repeatedly stated I am quite certain that we may expect very soon to find examples of the pre Basholi pictorial art which will bridge the present existing gap between the 11th, 12th and 17th centuries.