

Impact of Nationalism on *Pichhava* Paintings

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The word *pichhava* means hanging at the back (Sanskrit word '*pichh*' means back and '*vais*' means hanging). The *pichhava*'s are large religious scroll made on cotton cloth using natural colours, depicting Srinathji's leela. It is recognized for frequent use of pure gold colour, vibrant flat colour patches, stylized form, and detailed elaboration. *Pichhava* painting school originated in the Aravali hills on the bank of Banas River at Nathdwara in Rajasthan. The tradition of making *Pichhava* painting is as old as the history of the main temple of Shrinathji because this painting tradition developed and reached its culminating point around the temple of Shrinathji in Nathdwara. The demand for *Pichhava* paintings grown up as religious souvenirs or religious scrolls used for worshipping and carried out by pilgrims' had been coming to visit the temple of Shrinathji in Nathdwara.

During Mughal period Emperor Aurangzeb ordered his soldiers to destroy all Hindu temples and its images, and then the main priest Goswami Damodarlal, in order to save the image, ran away from Goverdhan hilltop to Mewar with the image. He reached the village Sinhar, the cart, carrying image struck in the mud and this was taken as an omen that the god wished to reside here, therefore under the supervision of Maharaja Raj Singh, a big temple was erected in Sinhar. The main image of Srinathji was installed in 1672CE and afterwards on the name of Srinathji this place was called Nathdwara meaning portal of the God. This image of Shrinathji in the main temple is 1.37 meters tall and made of black stone. This image reveals a young Krishna with his left hand raised in a gesture that indicates he is holding up the mountain Goverdhan.

Vithalnath was chief priest of Shrinathji temple and son of Vallabhacharya (founder of the Pushtimarg sect of the Lord Sri Krishna believers). He united kings and merchants for providing economical help and managing the temple administration. The artists of *Pichhava* maker were employed by temple administration and they were making *Pichhava* for different seasons and ritual ceremonies on the order of the chief priest. There are three main castes of artists who make these paintings in Nathdwara are Gaur, Jangirs and a group of artists migrated from Delhi and Alwar. The Gaur claims to be Brahmin and to have migrated from Udaipur. The Jangirs were migrated from Jaipur and Jodhpur. Later the Pushtimarg sect of the Lord Sri Krishna believers reached to Gujarat and other regions via Mathura and with religious believers/followers of Pushtimarg, the tradition of making of *Pichhava* paintings reached these sites.

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In the early of the nineteenth century during colonial period at one side westernized painting schools or art forms like; oil painting, watercolour painting, printing and photography etc. introduced by the British masters in India had been admired by Indian art lovers, especially Indian elite class a lot meanwhile another side at some regional centres traditional and folk art forms were continuing in its unique manner. Pichhavai Painting tradition at Nathdwara is one of the traditional art schools.

Unfortunately due to increasing westernization, during the late nineteenth century in Indian society, the dominance of westernized art forms or painting schools was kept extending whereas opposite to this survival for the traditional painting forms became difficult. Therefore, the artisans of the traditional painting schools, like, artisans of *pat* painting Odisha, *kalighat* painting of Kolkata and *pichhavai* paintings of Nathdwara, began to work in two different manners. At one hand the artisans were continued to the original manner of making paintings as these painting had been used for religious purposes while another hand some of the artists started to adopt few elements from the westernized painting schools or started to work in western oil painting technique for increasing demand of their paintings.

Narayana, Champalal, and Kundalal who studied in J.J. School of Arts and Crafts, Bombay is some pioneer names of the artists worked in oil painting technique in Nathdwara Rajasthan. Narottam was an artist who produced many oil paintings related to *krishna-lila* scenes throughout the first half of the twentieth century. One of the beautiful examples of his painting is '*krishna-lila*' made in 1920-35 in the collection of Anil Relia, Ahmedabad.

For increasing demand of the *pichhavai* paintings and doing an experiment in this art form the artisans, who were making traditional style of *pichhavai* paintings at Nathdwara, taken some of the elements from the western oil painting school, as a result, the *pichhavai* paintings began to look more realistic instead of stylized. After 1880 AD an old method of showing the feet splayed sideways had begun to be replaced by the technique of foreshortening. Not only an experiment in the representation of feet of Srinathji happened but a new change in the depiction of the face of Srinathji also had taken place. As a result in the early twentieth century, artists began to paint Shrinathji as a young boy with fleshy, broadly smiling face. Through images (Plate 1) and (Plate 2) a difference between earlier and later representation of the Face of Shri Nathji can be seen prominently.



Figure:1 Details of the *Pichhavai* paintings mentioned as Figure:3
Photo Courtesy: Author



Figure:2 Sketch of Srinathji, Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi,
Photo Courtesy: Author

There were two major causes who inspired artists to keep using elements of traditional *pichhavai* painting instead of adopting features of oil paintings and other western painting schools. The first one is the religious use of *pichhavai* painting. In spite of hanging *pichhavai* behind the main image of Shrinathji this religious scroll has been used for covering plates, stools and other utility items are used in the worship of Shrinathji in the temple. For the religious purpose priests and pilgrims preferred traditional type of *pichhavai* painting.

Another major cause was various political movements like Swadeshi (c.1905), non-cooperation with Simon commission (c.1920-1922) etc, emerged during the colonial period and influenced art, artists and common Indian people deeply. Such movements inspired Indian to support Indian-ness through words and acts both and to discard westernization. As a result, the artists who got westernized and started to work in western art manner for earning more money and to attract a westernized class of art lovers turned back towards traditional paintings schools. Not only artists who were trained in Indian traditional painting school at Rajasthan, like artists of Nathdwara, but the artists who were trained in western painting school at other centers of India also turned towards traditional or folk paintings schools and developed their new painting style free from the influence of western manner. Name of Jamini Roy, Nandalal Bose is a pioneer in this category.



Figure 3: Srinathji- Krishna Celebrating the Festival of Sarad- Purnima, Nathdwara, Mewar, Rajasthan, c.1800, cotton cloth, 150 x 117 c.m., Accession No. 60.1573, Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi, India, Photo Courtesy: Author

A beautiful example of traditional Pichhavai painting is in the collection of the National Museum of New Delhi represents the scene (Figure 3) of *Raaslila* on *Sarad-Purnima*. *Sharad-Purnima* is the 15th day of the bright half of the month of Ashvin. On this day Krishna performed *Maha-Raas*, the great circle dance with the *gopis*. In the present painting Srinathji is seen standing in the center of the painting as usually and raised his left hand in a gesture of holding up the mountain Goverdhan to protect his villagers from the wrath of the storm by god Indra. Gopis are standing on him either side. The border of this painting has twenty-four registers each decorated with twenty-four different *shringars* (adornment) of Srinathji (*thakurji*) one for each fortnight. On the top in the center, a full moon and sky full with stars are depicted beautifully. Various god and goddess seated on flying chariots are showering flowers on the image of Shrinathji. In the foreground scenes related to childhood events of Krishna is painted beautifully. Illustration of the grey water tank in the foreground is a symbolic representation of the river Yamuna.

At present era, *pichhavai* painting is being admired by art lover on an international platform for its beauty and religious values. The artist working for producing traditional pichhavai paintings played a significant role to keep alive this one of the oldest traditional painting schools of India in its original manner even in adverse circumstances. Shri Kundalal (c.1860-1930), TilakayitGoverdhanlal, Omkarlal (1860-1933), Narayan(1860-1933),Ghasiram(1869-1931),ChampalalGaur(c.1875-1930),Narottam(1896-1990) and TilakayitGovindilal (1927-1995) were some important earlier artists of Nathadwara painting. After the death of these artists, their sons and grandsons have continued their traditional painting school in Nathadwara. Some of the renowned artists of the early twenty-first century are Ghanshyam (1924-2002), grandson of Narayan, Dev Krishna and Paramananda are grandsons of artist Champalal Gaur.

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