



Miniature Paintings

For Prelims: [Miniature painting](#), [Bhimbetaka caves](#), [Delhi Sultanate](#), Pala School of Art, Mughal Era Miniature Painting, [Upper Paleolithic Period](#), [Mesolithic Period](#), [Chalcolithic Period](#)

For Mains: Evolution of Painting in India, Need to conservation of pre-historic paintings, paintings as a historical records of the past time, Miniature Painting as Cultural Identity, [Upper Paleolithic Period](#), [Mesolithic Period](#), [Chalcolithic Period](#).

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

A recent New Delhi exhibition showcased the evolving relevance and global interpretations of South Asian [miniature painting](#), featuring 20 diverse artists and emphasizing its dynamic cultural significance.

What are Miniature Paintings?

▪ About:

- The term 'miniature' comes from the Latin 'Minium,' meaning red lead paint, used in Renaissance illuminated manuscripts.
- These small, detailed paintings are typically no larger than 25 square inches, with subjects painted at 1/6th of their actual size. Common features include bulging eyes, pointed noses, and slim waists.

▪ **Early Miniature:** Early miniature paintings were initially less refined, featuring minimal decoration. Over time, they evolved to include more detailed embellishments, ultimately becoming similar to today's miniature paintings.

- They were **often painted for either books or albums**, on perishable material including paper, palm leaves and cloth. These paintings developed between the **8th and 12th centuries** and can be attributed to the eastern and western regions. Two prominent schools of early miniature paintings are:
 - **Pala School of Art:** This school was flourishing during **750-1150 AD**. These paintings are generally found as a part of **Buddhist manuscripts** and were generally executed on palm leaf or vellum paper.
 - These paintings are characterised by **sinuous lines and subdued tones** of the background imagery. There are lonely single figures in the paintings and one rarely finds group paintings.
 - The proponents of the **Vajrayana school of Buddhism** also used and patronised these paintings.
 - **Apabhramsa School of Art:** This school originated in **Gujarat and Mewar**, Rajasthan, dominating western Indian painting **from the 11th to 15th centuries**. Initially focusing on **Jain themes**, it later incorporated **Vaishnava subjects**.



Apabhramsa school of art

- **Miniature Art During [Delhi Sultanate](#):** These paintings tried to bring together the Persian elements of their origins with the Indian traditional elements.
 - An example is the **Nimatnama, a cookery book** created during the reign of Nasir Shah, who ruled Mandu.
- **Mughal Era Miniature Painting:** The paintings made in the Mughal period had a distinctive style as they were drawn from Persian antecedents.
 - Mughal art is recognized for its **diverse subjects beyond religious themes**. The emphasis shifted from depicting gods to glorifying rulers and their lives. Artists focused on hunting scenes.
 - They brought the technique of foreshortening to the Indian painter's repertoire. Under this technique, **"objects were drawn in a way that they look closer and smaller than they really are"**.
 - **Contribution of Mughal Rulers:**
 - **Akbar:** Founded Tasvir Khana, an artistic studio and promoted calligraphy.
 - **Jahangir:** Mughal painting peaked, favoring naturalistic themes (flora and fauna) and decorated margins. Example: **Zebra and cock paintings**.
 - **Shah Jahan:** Inspired by European art, it introduced stillness and pencil sketching while incorporating more gold, silver, and brighter color palettes.
- **Miniatures in South India:**
 - **Tanjore Paintings:** It is famous for decorative paintings. The **Maratha rulers** patronized them **during the 18th century**.
 - **Mysore Paintings:** Mysore Paintings **depict Hindu gods and goddesses**. They uniquely feature multiple figures, with **one figure dominating in size and color**.
- **Regional Schools of Art:**
 - **Rajasthani Schools of Painting:**
 - **Mewar School of Painting:** Mewar painting is dominated by the extraordinary figure of Sahibdin.
 - **Kishangarh School of Painting:** Paintings were associated with the most romantic legends – **Sawant Singh and his beloved Bani Thani**, and of the intertwining of lives and myths, romance and bhakti.
 - **Pahari Styles of Painting:** This style of painting developed in the sub-himalayan states: **Jammu or Dogra School** (Northern Series) and **Basholi & Kangra School** (Southern Series).
- **Modern Paintings:** During the **colonial period**, Company Paintings emerged, **blending Rajput, Mughal, and Indian styles with European elements**. British officers employed Indian-trained painters, mixing European tastes with Indian techniques.

- **Bazaar Paintings:** This school was also influenced by the **European encounter in India**. They were different from the Company paintings as that school mixed European techniques and themes with Indian ones.
- **Bengal School of Art:** This school had a reactionary approach to the existing styles of paintings in the **1940s -1960s**. They used simple colours.
- **Cubist Style of Painting:** Inspired by **European Cubism**, in which objects were broken, analyzed, and reassembled using abstract forms, balancing line and color.

What are the Socio-Economic Impacts of Reviving Miniature Painting?

- **Economic Opportunities:** The resurgence of interest in miniature painting creates job opportunities for artists and artisans, contributing to local economies.
 - Art exhibitions **promote sales of artworks**, boosting income for participating artists.
- **Cultural Tourism:** Miniature paintings attract tourists interested in cultural heritage, enhancing tourism revenue.
 - Regions with rich miniature art traditions, like **Rajasthan**, can leverage tourists avenues to promote local crafts.
- **Community Engagement:** Workshops and exhibitions foster community involvement and awareness about traditional arts.
 - Educational programs can equip younger generations with the **knowledge and techniques to master** and sustain these traditional skills.

How does Painting Reflect the Cultural Identities of the Time?

- **Historical Context:** Miniature painting has roots in the **Mughal, Rajput, and Persian traditions**, flourishing between the **16th and 17th centuries**.
 - It served as a **medium for storytelling**, capturing both sacred and secular narratives with intricate details.
- **Regional Diversity:** India's diverse painting styles reflect **local socio-religious outlook**.
 - **Example:** Apabhramsa School of Art **depicts Jain and Vaishnava subjects**.
- **Government initiatives:** Projects like **the 'Ghar Ghar Museum'** preserve local art by encouraging community museums, maintaining traditional art forms, and fostering cultural identity and pride.
- **Contemporary Interpretations:** Artists today reinterpret traditional themes through modern lenses, addressing contemporary issues such as identity, spirituality, and socio-political commentary.
- **Social Commentary:** Paintings confront vital social issues such as gender roles, caste discrimination, and political unrest.
 - Visionaries like **Abanindranath Tagore (Bengal School of Art)**, celebrated for his painting **Bharat Mata**, championed a resurgence of indigenous art styles, resisting Western influences.
- **Cultural Preservation vs. Innovation:** While preserving traditional techniques, contemporary artists experiment with new motifs and mediums (**e.g., digital art**).
 - This dual approach ensures that miniature painting remains vibrant and relevant in today's art scene.

What Actionable Strategies Can Support the Growth of Miniature Painting?

- **Government Support:** Policies offering grants and subsidies to financially support artists. Creating dedicated art funds can enhance research, training, and exhibitions for miniature painting.
- **Educational Initiatives:** Adding miniature painting to school curricula can foster appreciation among youth. Collaborating with art institutions can offer training programs combining traditional and contemporary techniques.
 - The [Sahitya Akademi](#) holds nationwide workshops to promote regional art, enhancing and showcasing artists' skills.
- **International Collaborations:** Partnerships with international galleries and global art fairs can provide platforms for Indian artists to showcase their work globally.

- **Digital Platforms:** Utilising online platforms for monetising artworks can expand market reach beyond local boundaries.
 - Social media campaigns can raise awareness about miniature painting's significance and attract a broader audience.

Drishti Mains Question

Q. Examine how miniature painting preserves cultural identity while embracing modern artistic expressions.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. The painting of Bodhisattva Padmapani is one of the most famous and oft-illustrated paintings at (2017)

- (a) Ajanta
- (b) Badami
- (c) Bagh
- (d) Ellora

Ans: (a)

Q. Consider the following historical places: (2013)

1. Ajanta Caves
2. Lepakshi Temple
3. Sanchi Stupa

Which of the above places is/are also known for mural paintings?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 3
- (d) None

Ans: (b)

Q. There are only two known examples of cave paintings of the Gupta period in ancient India. One of these is paintings of Ajanta caves. Where is the other surviving example of Gupta paintings? (2010)

- (a) Bagh caves
- (b) Ellora caves
- (c) Lomas Rishi cave
- (d) Nasik caves

Ans: (b)

Q. The well-known painting “Bani Thani” belongs to the (2018)

- (a) Bundi school
- (b) Jaipur school
- (c) Kangra school
- (d) Kishangarh school

Ans: (d)

Q. Kalamkari painting refers to (2015)

- (a) a hand-painted cotton textile in South India
- (b) a handmade drawing on bamboo handicrafts in North-East India
- (c) a block-painted woollen cloth in Western Himalayan region of India
- (d) a hand-painted decorative silk cloth in NorthWestern India

Ans: (a)

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