

Design Resource

Mysore Painting

Classical South Indian Paintings

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Mr. Antony William

and Mr. C. Susanth

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/mysore-painting>



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Introduction

Origin and Historical Background:

Mysore Painting is a form of classical South Indian painting, which evolved in the Mysore city of Karnataka. During the reign of the Wodeyars and under their patronage the Mysore school of painting reached its height. Mysore school whose best tradition was evident during the 17th, 18th and 19th century was relatively unknown to the world. The paintings evolved as a refinement of the old Vijayanagar school as is evident from the art forms in the ceiling of the Sri Virupaksha temple at the Hampi in Bellary district. In 1565 after the Vijayanagar empire fell then it came to be called the Mysore school of painting. Raja Wodeyar rehabilitated the families of painters who were in distress after the fall of Vijayanagar Empire. The successors of Raja Wodeyar namely “Ranadhira Kanth-eerava Narasimharaja Wodeyar” and “Chikka devaraja Wodeyar” patronized art by getting the various temples painted with deities and mythological scenes. But the consequent wars between Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan and the British led to loss of these treasures. The Mysore style was again revived in early years of the 19th century under “Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar” (1799-1868). Some of the most beautiful and refined work was produced during his rule as the king himself took a very keen and personal interest in the art of painting. The illustrations in the manuscript of the famous cultural encyclopedia ‘Sri Tattva-nidhi’ are examples of the king’s sophisticated taste and patronage. Mysore paintings form a significant tradition of the classical south Indian paintings. These paintings are famous for their elegance, peculiar usage of colors and the stress on detailing. It requires tremendous hard work, patience as well as extraordinary expertise and proficiency to make a piece of Mysore painting. Under British hegemony, the Wodeyars, freed from security concerns, shifted attention to the patronage of the fine arts. Under their patronage, Mysore became a cultural centre of Karnataka, fostering a number of famous musicians, writers and painters.

Artists have different mindsets in terms of economy. In earlier times homeless artists used to take refuge in king’s palace or wealthy people. Instead of giving money, they used to make paintings for them. Now a days, artists decide the price of the painting on the basis of amount of gold foil used in the painting and the skill involved. Today also only wealthy people can afford to buy them. Carrying the old tradition in modern time is a status symbol for people.

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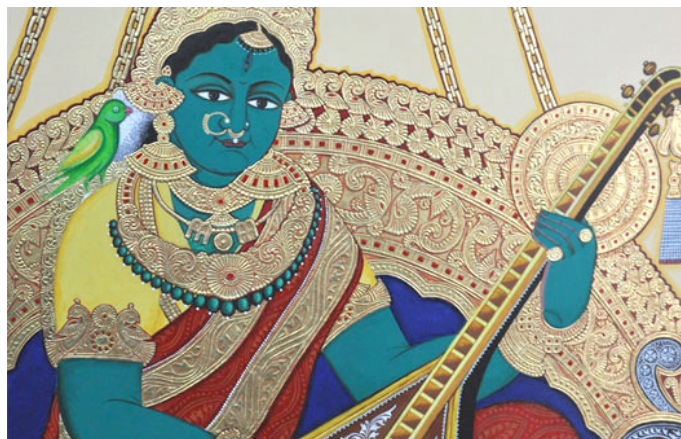
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Subjects and Techniques

In Mysore style of paintings the most popular themes are Goddess Rajarajeshwari and Sri Rama Pattabhishekam, Kodandarama, Dashavathara, Chamundeshwari apart from Lakshmi and Saraswathi, the coronation of Sri Rama (Rama pattabhisheka), wedding of Shiva and Parvati (Girijakalyana), Sri Rama with bow and arrows (Kodanda-Rama), Sri Krishna with his foster mother (Yashoda-Krishna) and the goddess Chamundeshwari, the family deity of the Mysore royal house. Occasionally portraits of the king and his family were painted. 19th century Mysore artists created paintings of Hindu Myths, Gods and epic heroes as well as scenes of court life and battle. Though the subjects were religious and mythological, the models were from real life.

The figures have features like fish shaped eye, round protruded chin, typical Mysore royal hairdo and drapping style in sarees, depiction of royal jewellery, rounded face, Mysore turban. They depict sugarcane as bow and arrow in the pictures of Raja - Rajeshwari. The foot of goddesses is placed on flower in order to show the respect. And the architectural backgrounds of many paintings are faithful copies of the architectural features of the Mysore palace. There are many paintings in which the subjects they have shown are based on shlokas that are mentioned in the book named "Devatahanama kusumamanjari" written by the king of Mysore "Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar". "Krishna Sakhis" is the example of painting in which the backside of the figure is shown. Another example "Mantramayi Rama" where the artist has made the figure of Shri Rama, in which they have made the outline by writing Rama in Kannada. Schematic themes of Tirupati, Sringapatna, Kanchipuram, Srikakulam, Kalthasti etc. provided the base for the paintings in earlier times.

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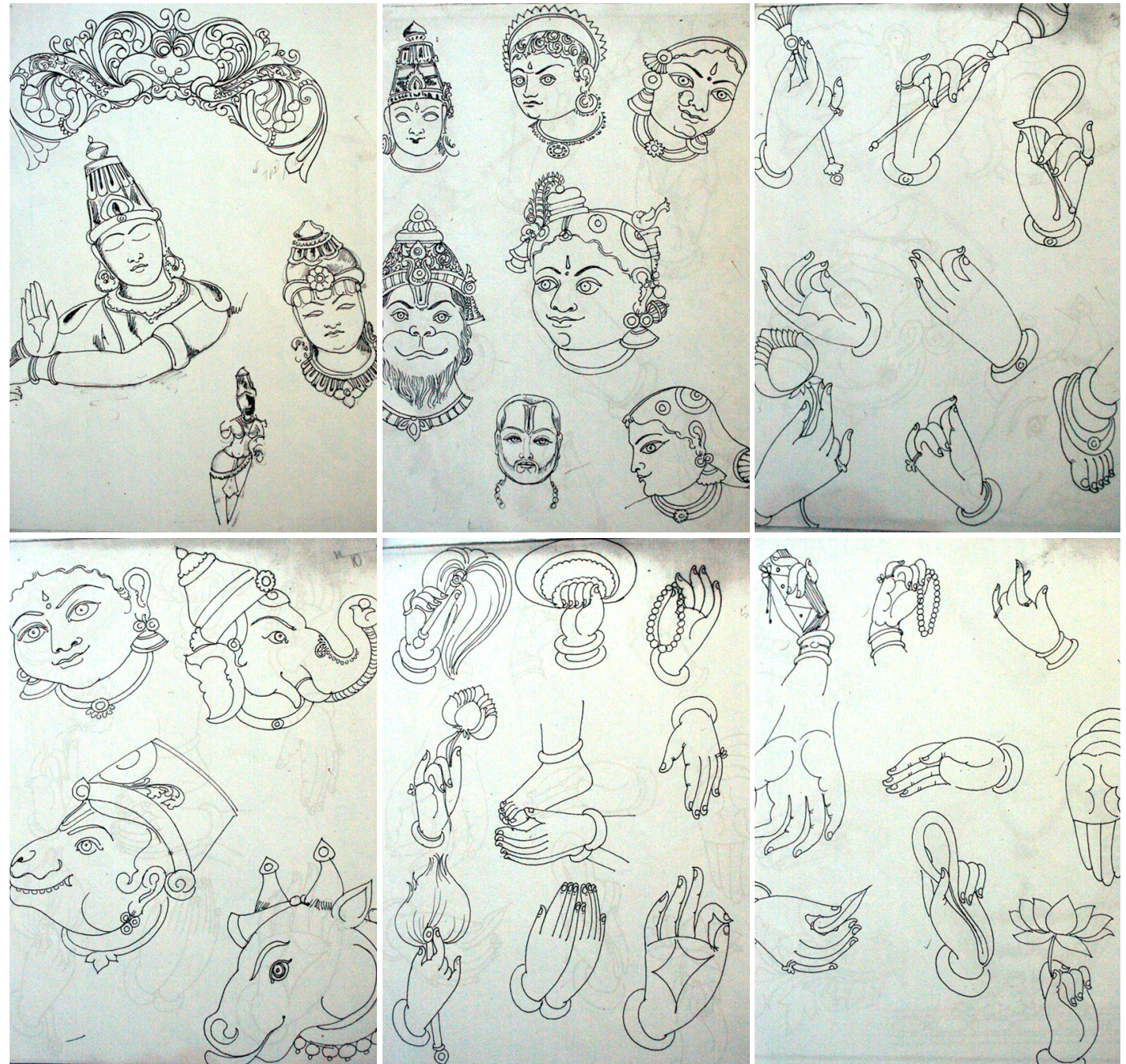
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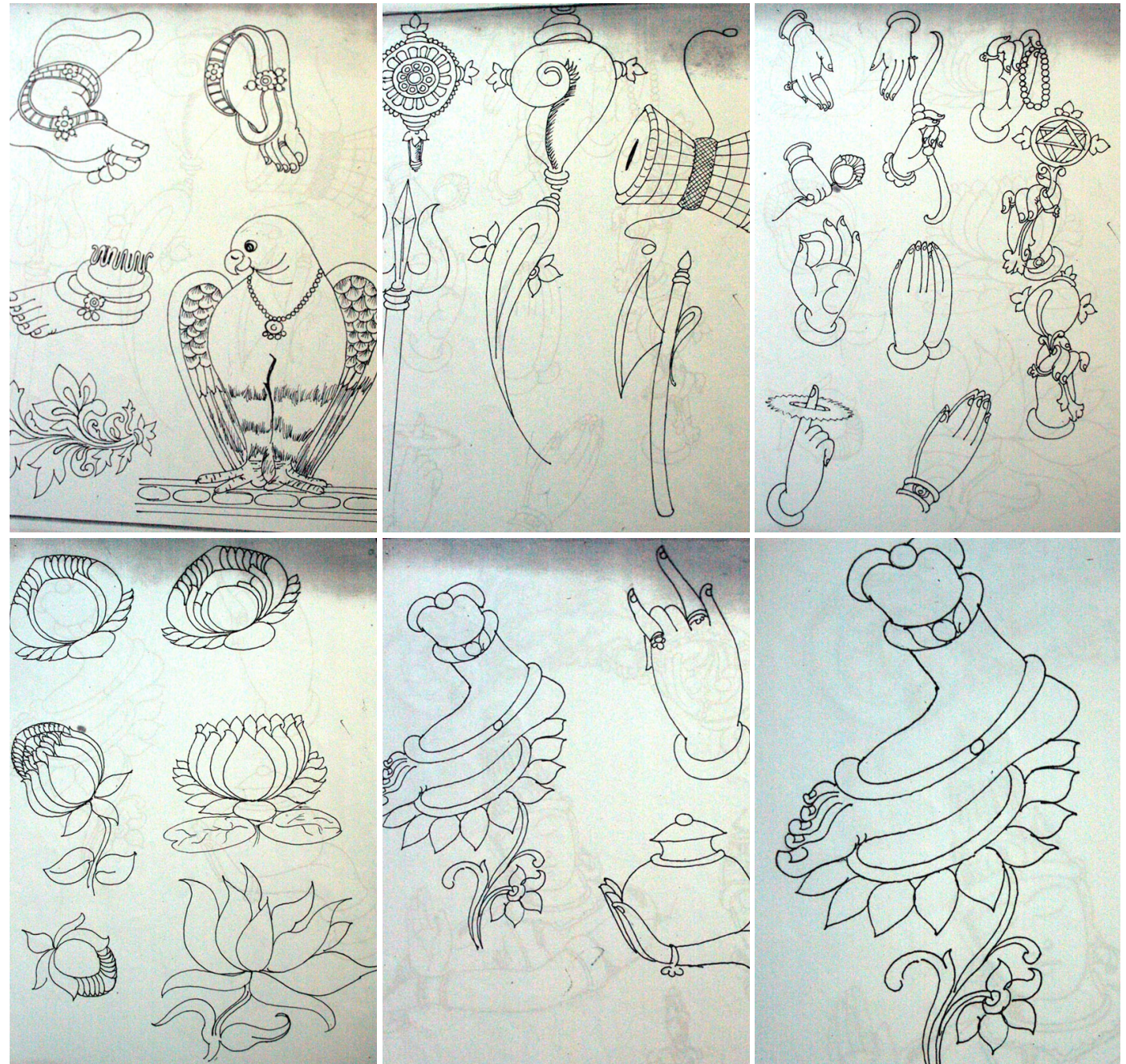
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Mysore Painting Process

Earlier to make a base for painting, artists used to paste 10-20 layers of newspaper, on that they paste the drawing sheet over which they apply the paste of refined flour (Maida). Now days, artists have changed the technique of using the base. They use mount board, over which they paste ivory sheet or cartridge sheet and start the painting. The first step requires the artist to make a preliminary sketch of the image on the base. Thereafter, he makes a paste of zinc oxide and Arabic gum, known as 'gesso paste'. This paste is used to give a slightly raised effect of carving to those parts of the painting that require embellishments and is allowed to dry. The artist does two coatings of this paste to make a proper raised surface. Then, gold foil is pasted onto the surface, using Arabic gum. Now a day's fevicolis used in place of gum. Some artists apply varnish after gesso paste so as to avoid cracking of gold foil in future. They left the gold foil dried for another 6-8 hours. After which they use brush to remove the excess gold. Some used cotton in place of brush. Since it is gold foil, which is very expensive, they use the left out gold foil on some other surfaces of painting. The rest of the painting is prepared with the help of water colors. Initially they used natural dyes, which are replaced by synthetic poster colors and water colors in modern times.

The basic colors that we can see in any Mysore painting are primary colors: Red, Green and Blue. Earlier the colours used were made out of natural resources and were very few like green, blue, yellow, red, black and white. Colours were extracted from vegetables leaves and flowers. Earth colours were also used to a large extent. Colour preparation was interesting process in which the artists themselves were involved. For instance green was made from lemon juice, which was filled in copper container and buried for few days, and allow it to turn into green. They complete the painting in two coats. Starting with one color, the artist applies the same color in the painting where ever it is needed. Then the process moves on. In the place of gold, they apply yellow color; later on cover it with slightly thick layer of Gesso paste. Over which they paste gold foil. Using a mixture of black Indian ink and poster color to reduce the glossy effect does intricate design on gold foil. After the painting is fully dried, it is covered with a thin paper and rubbed lightly with a smooth soft stone.

There are three types of paintings:

Paintings with plain gold foil without embossing.

Paintings with embossing.

MakkiSafeda Work:

Firstly the base color is painted, then after shades of white color (zinc oxide: super white) is applied.

Border is compulsory in every painting; done in black and yellow color prominently. The artist highlights the main figures in yellow color mainly to differentiate it from the background.

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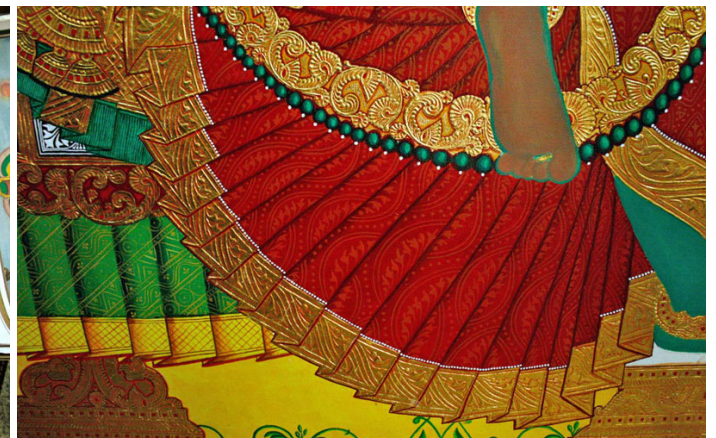
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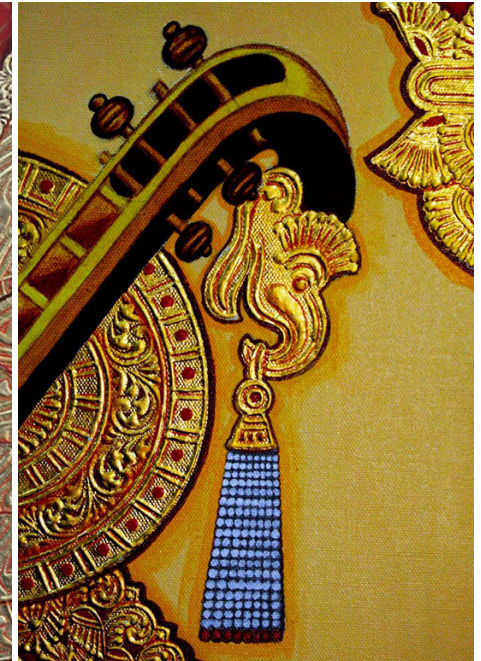
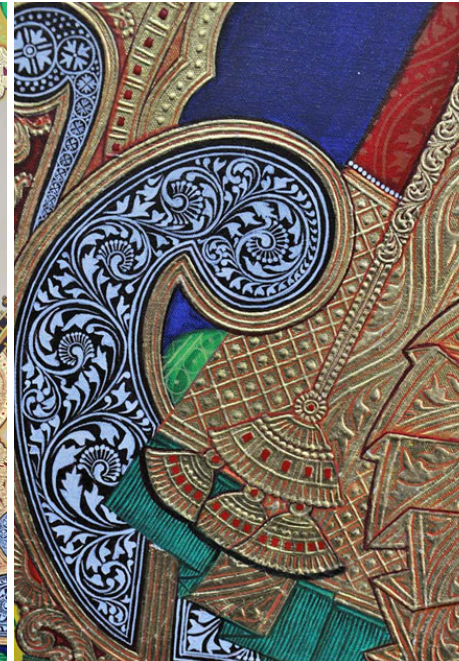
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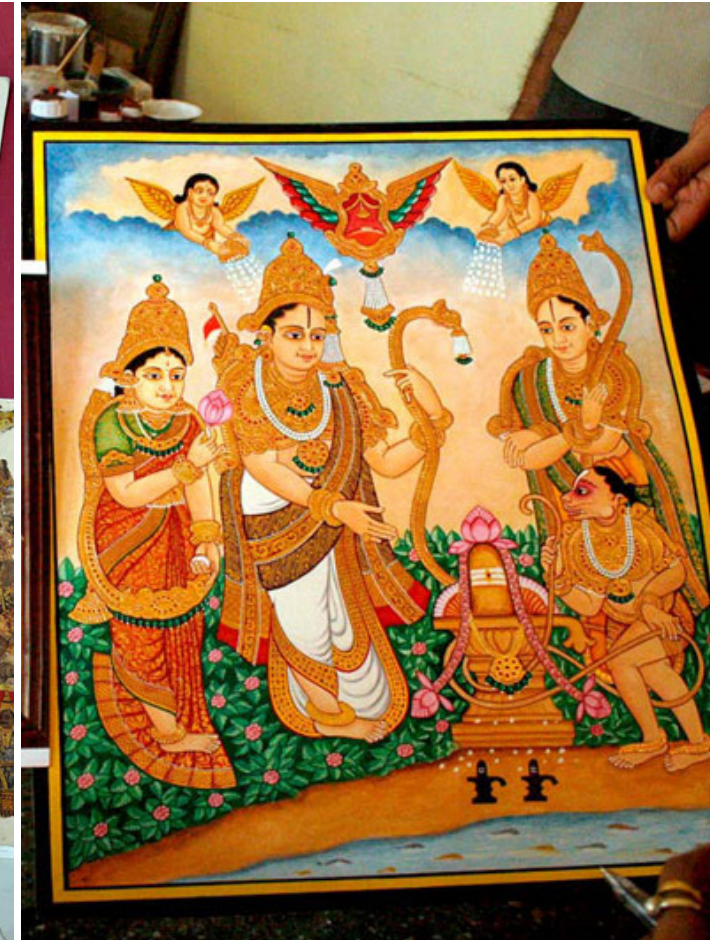
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Tools and Materials

In the traditional Mysore paintings, all the inputs were made by the artists like brushes, paints, board, gold foil, etc. The sketches were made with the help of charcoal, which was prepared by burning tamarind twigs in an iron tube. The brushes were made of different materials, like squirrel hair, camel hair, goat hair, etc. Even today the artists prefer squirrel haired brush instead of synthetic brushes because they are more durable and refined. Some artists use plucker to remove the excess of gold foil. Variation exists in the procedure of mixing colors. Some artists use ceramic tiles for better mixing of colors. For the background colors they use small dishes and coconut shells. They get the color in granular form and use it by mixing water. In case of poster colors they remove the excess oil from the top to achieve matte finish. The process of making Arabic gum involves the artist gets it in granular form and then dip it in water for overnight and then filter it using muslin cloth.



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Attempt of Exploration

Apart from watercolor and poster color, now artists have also tried to work in acrylic medium so as to maintain the freshness of color for a long time. But they do feel that working in water color is much easier and handy because they are free to give any kind of effect they wanted to give in the painting. It is easy to make intricate designs in water color than acrylic. Acrylic color is used to show the flatness of background in painting. They have also tried to change the treatment of figures. In some paintings the artists have shown angels with western hair-do in which the artists have changed it into Indian hair style. They also attempted to change the position of the figure and corrected the mistakes in the existing one.



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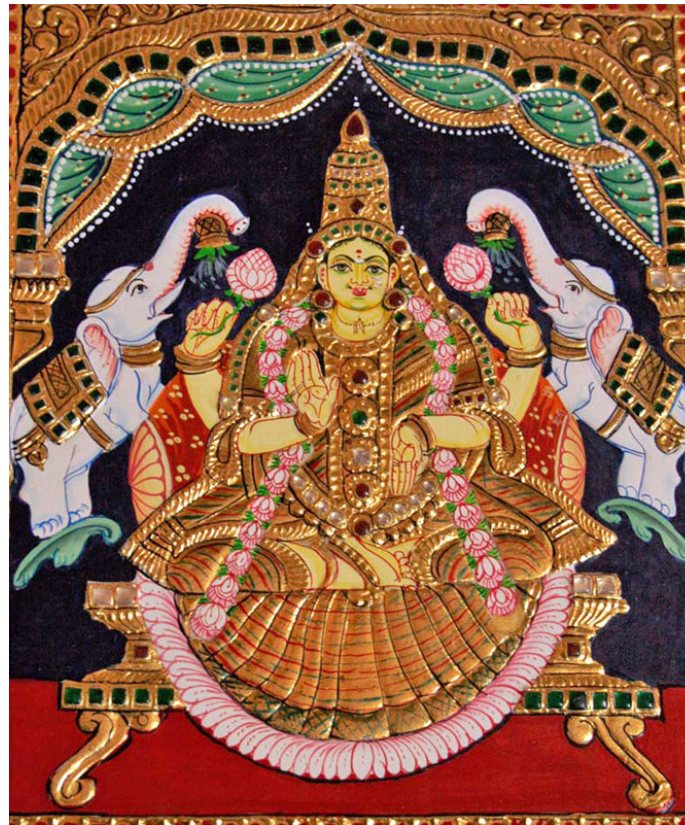
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Tanjore and Mysore Painting

Tanjore painting involves numerous stages, such as meticulous laying out, perfect sketching, elegant ornamenting with stones, intricate embossing work and gold foiling the deities and finally the finishing enrichment. Embossing is done with a mixture of raw lime stone powder sieved through the muslin cloth and mixed with chalk powder, glue and copper sulphate in certain proportion. Gold leaves, semi precious stones and mirrors are used to give it the grand look. In the olden days gold dust or bhasma was used instead of gold leaves. All the paintings are done with traditionally made gold foils. Colors used for painting are fungus resistant. The painting lasts for generations. There are few differences between Tanjore and Mysore style of Painting. In Tanjore, the gesso work is thicker in comparison to the Mysore painting. They also put wooden cardboard to increase the thickness of gesso layer. That gives it a three dimensional feel. Color stones are used in Tanjore painting. In Tanjore painting, the gold foil used is thick while in Mysore painting the foil is delicate in nature. In Tanjore paintings main subject is to depict the life of Krishna, whereas in Mysore Style, theme is Universal.



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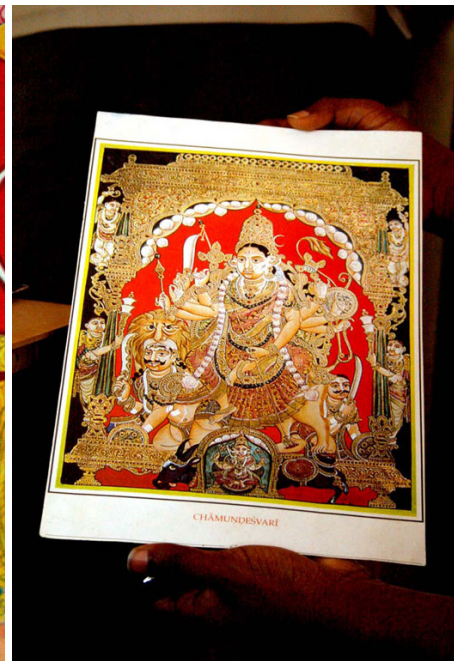
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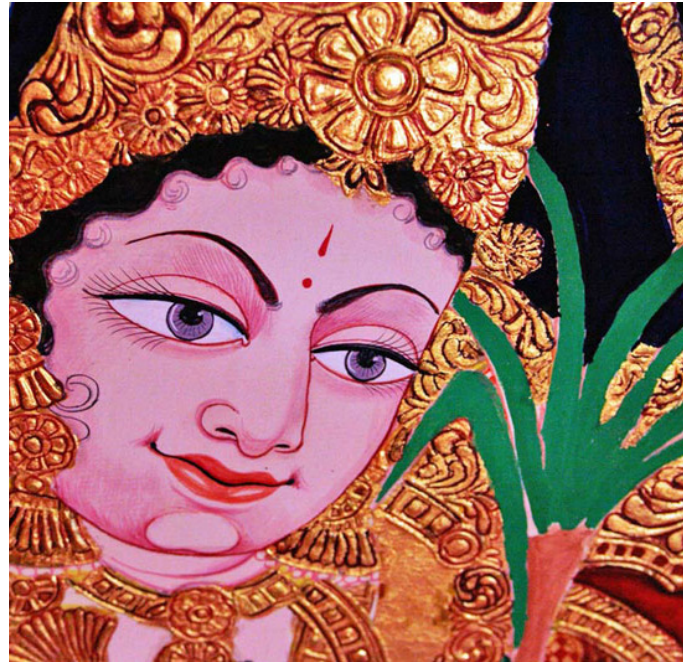
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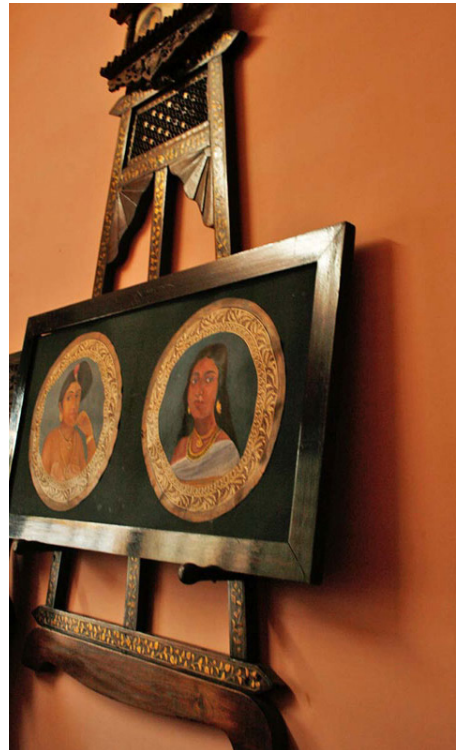
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Mysore-Ganjifa Painting

“Ganjifa” is the name given to an ancient Indian card game. Historically the game is believed to be brought to India during the Mughal period. The name Ganjifa comes from the Persian word “Ganjifeh” which means playing cards. The specialty of these cards is that they are traditionally hand-painted. The cards are typically circular although some rectangular decks have been produced. This was a game that was popular and played across Medieval India. Each region in the country had its own form of the game. There was the Sawantwadi-Ganjifa from Maharashtra, Navadurga-Ganjifa from Orrisa, Rajasthan and GujratGanjifa, Kashmir Ganjifa, Nepal Ganjifa and the Mysooru-Ganjifa. Mysooru-Ganjifa was extensively patronised by the Mysore Royal Family – The Wodeyar Kings. Given that the main aim of the game was to teach, learn and tell stories from the ancient scriptures and holy books, all the 18 games in the Mysooru-Ganjifa Style were set to stories and shloka's from the Hindu Purana's, stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. The Dashavatara-Ganjifa which is a series based on the 10 different forms of the Hindu God Vishnu was the most popular of the 18 Ganjifa games. The Dashavatara-Ganjifa has a set of 120 different playing cards. Today, apart from mythological subjects the artists have also started to paint subjects like portraits of maharaja.

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Influences on Mysore Painting

Raja Ravi Varma's Influence:

Raja Ravi Varmahas influencedand inspired generations of artists from different streams in India. He was the first artist to cast the Indian Gods and mythological characters in natural earthy surroundings using an European realism; a depiction adopted not only by the Indian “calendar-art” spawning ubiquitous images of Gods and Goddesses, but also by literature and later by the Indian film industry affecting their dress and form even today. Raja Ravi Varma influenced some of the Mysore Artists to some extent. The artists tried to bring the raja Ravi Verma style realism in the Mysore paintings. They have tried to reproduce Ravi Varma's painting in Mysore style.

Other Cultural Influences:

During the end part of 19th and in the beginning part of 20th century the introduction of the Graeco-Roman model of European art brought about a change in public attitudes and tastes, which caused some traditional Mysore painters to undertake a complete change in the form and technique of their paintings. The figurative style became more realistic under the European influence, developing a three-dimensional representation of subject matter based upon the principles of perspective, anatomy and proportion. This caused consternation among some groups who felt that the very essence of the Mysore tradition– formal and icon-like figures of gods and goddesses that could be worshipped – was lost. However, others argued that the introduction of realistic techniques could actually serve to enhance the devotional aspect of the traditional Mysore style, as the deities would be brought to life through the new techniques and thus the paintings would have greater impact upon the viewer.

There are three elements of Mysore Painting:

Indo- European Style Architecture: European pediments.

European Elements: Indian Gods and Goddesses sitting on French chair, European treatment of Clouds and Landscape, clock, candles, Angles, Chandelier. This is brought up because of Tipu Sultan's relation with French.

Recurring Themes in several paintings: The typical way Mysore Saree is drapped, attitude on the faces of figures just like Mysore Maharanis, throne with seven steps, entire Mysore tradition and culture.

The Mysore style inherited details like absence of Naturalism, lines and dignity of contours, color and drapery dispositions only for formal and ornamental purposes but it retained the DHAVALA details (Jain Scripture “Kalpasutra”) like the sculpture models for drawing figure, the linear draughtsmanship, heavy and angular features, postural expressions and the emphasis on contour lines. Delineation of forms, figures, postures, expressions, Colors to highlight contours and competent and creative, folk elements in classical depictions.

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Mysore Painting

Classical South Indian Paintings

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Mr. Antony William

and Mr. C. Susanth

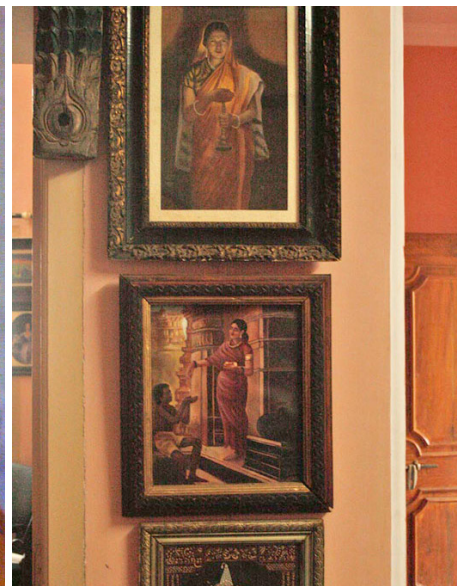
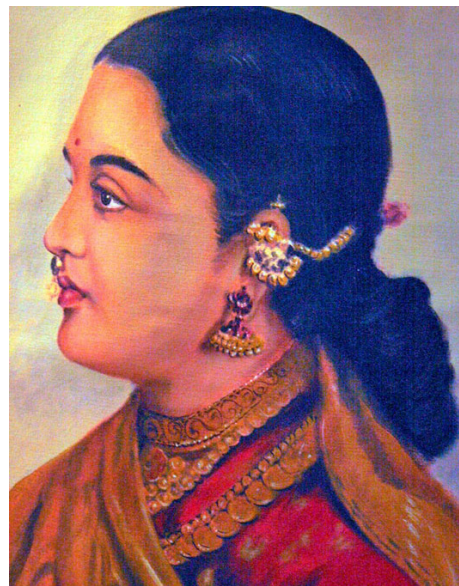
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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/mysore-painting/influences-mysore-painting>



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Famous Mysore Artists

Sri K.S. Shreehari: A painter who tried to revive and establish the family heritage in a more concrete manner. Apart from the subjects like Raja Rajeshwari, Sri Rama-pattabhisheka, Kodandarama, Tripuraasura-Samhaara, 32 forms of Ganesha and familiar themes of traditional painters of Mysore, Mr. Shreehari proved his expertise in the paintings of such exotic themes like a zigzag puzzle like 'Panchanaari-Turaga', i.e., figure of horse comprising five female figures and 'Navanaari-Kunjara' i.e., figure of elephant comprising nine female figures. One of his works entitled 'VirataVishwaroopa' testifies to his eye for minutest details and a creative imagination, it represents a form of Vishnu embodying the entire universe with all its animate and inanimate objects.

M. Ramanarasaiah: He was the curator of Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery for a long time and has executed most of the paintings related to the Mysore Royal Family. Mr. Ramanarasaiah was the palace artist and was also in charge of the exhibits of the gallery. He is a very famous mysore artist. He has done a lot of paintings depicting Mysore culture and tradition, having the same subject/theme. He has been an inspiration for existing and upcoming Artists.

Ms. Chandrika: She is the daughter of Shri Ramanarasaiah and has been following her father's footsteps. She works on subjects mentioned in shlokas. Apart from Mysore painting, she has worked on Tanjore and Ganjifa painting. She has also tried to replicate Raja Ravi Varma's painting. She has rich experience of working with different medium like watercolor, acrylic and oil.

Mr. Aanand: Mr. Anand is one of the Mysore painting artist in Mysore. He has learnt this style of painting by himself guided by famous artists in Mysore. Currently, he teaches many students and promotes this art. He works on various subjects ranging from Gods, Goddesses and Dussehra Festivals. He also does retouching and curator's job for ruined paintings. He also does painting by mixing Tanjore and Mysore traditional painting styles water painting, oil painting, recreation of Ravi Varma's paintings and photography.

B.P. Ramakrishna: Shri B.P. Ramakrishna is one of the traditional artists in Mysore with about 35 years of experience. He has two sons Ashwin and Naveen who are completely supporting his father in painting works. Shri B.P. Ramakrishna also provides training on Mysore traditional painting. The basic training course is oftwo and half monthsduration.

R.G. Singh: Mr. R. G. Singh is a well known curator in Mysore. He has a great interest in Mysore paining and has a good collection of Mysore painting. He has a complete historical account of Mysore Painting.

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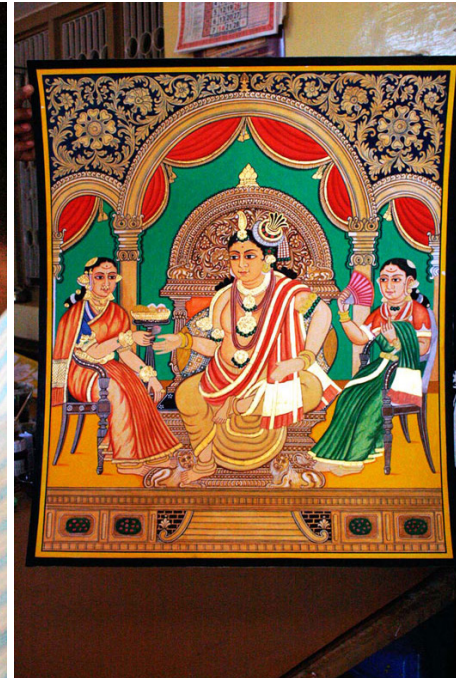
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Video



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Contact Details

This documentation was done by **Professor Bibhudutta Baral**, Mr. Antony William and Mr. C. Susanth at **NID, Bengaluru**.

You can get in touch with Professor Bibhudutta Baral at [bibhudutta\[at\]nid.edu](mailto:bibhudutta[at]nid.edu).

You could write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

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