

Design Resource

## Thangka Painting - Mysore

Art of Tibetan Painting

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Divyadarshan C. S., Srikant

and Tejas

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

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



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## Introduction

### Place:

Bylakuppe is a small town located near Mysore (90 kilometers) district of Karnataka, established by Lugsum Samdupling in the year 1961 and by Dickyi Larsoe in 1969. It has the largest number of Tibetan people, and the place has now grown into full-fledged town housing the largest Tibetan population. Bylakuppe is a pleasant and peaceful town that has divided into 4 camps. The famous monastery called as Namdroling is located in Bylakuppe. The houses located in the town are different with the Tibetan style tiled roofs. Usually the Monks are dressed with chrome Yellow and maroon color dress which symbolizes as saints (preaching of Buddha). The multi colored Tibetan flag which includes (red, white, green, blue and yellow colors) is known as “DAR CHO” (in Tibetan language) and the bells are tied which flutters in the wind.

### About Thangka:

Thangka is derived from the Tibetan word ‘than’ which means flat and ‘ka’ means painting (according to the book “Art of Tibetan Painting” referred by artisans in Bylakuppe) which is one of the traditional paintings originated from Nepalese art form exported to Tibet that is practiced in Bylakuppe as well. Thangka is a complex three-dimensional object consisting of a picture panel which is painted or embroidered on silk or cotton textile. To make a thangka painting, the painter should have precise knowledge of the measurements and proportions of each deity as established by Buddhist iconography.

In the Buddhist land, these are not just colorful wall hangings but symbolize the divine beauty. This is a painting done on a flat surface which can also be rolled up like a scroll when it is not on display.

Buddhism has strong influence of development in Tibet culture since introduction from 7th and 12th centuries and also in neighboring countries like India Nepal and china. The art and culture of Tibetans consist of the elements of Buddhist beliefs, the paintings made on cotton and silk cloth are traditional paintings depicting religious and theological subjects. The art of Thangka paintings has reached the classical levels in Tibetan culture and traditions. Thangka painting is an art depicting the life of Buddha and other deities. It also influences the mythological event relating and concerning to Lamas. The devotional paintings of Thangka are used in ceremony and prayer rituals. Most importantly, this religious art is used as a meditation tool to help bring one-self, and to the path of enlightenment.

### Green Tara (Goddess Lakxmi):

Green Thara is also called as “Mother of All Buddhas”. The paintings of Green Tara are made to protect against the Eight Great Dangers. Mainly Green colour is used for the making which indicates the nature and active compassion of the Goddess. The goddess is known for helping those in need with quickness of lightning.

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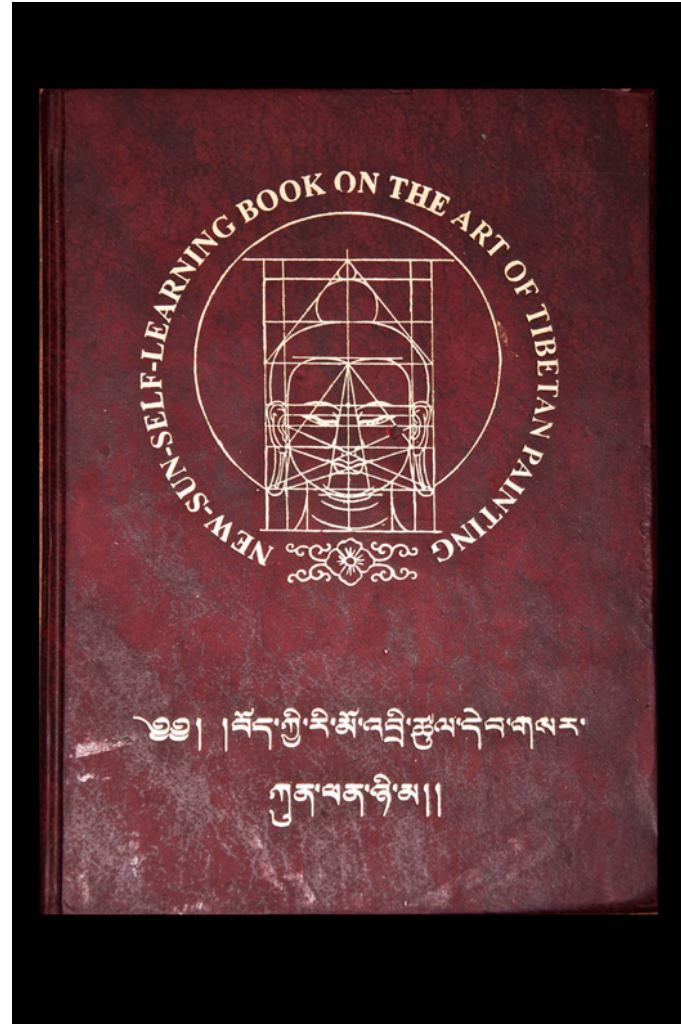
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The art book for learning traditional Thangka painting.



Work environment of the place where artisan make Thangka painting.



It requires lot of patience and knowledge of colours accuracy of anatomy measurements to prepare a thangka painting.

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Two different type of green Thara (Mother of all Buddhas) painting.



The skilled artisans who are involved in making thangka painting.



All the paintings of thangka is painted with sky and nature in the background.

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## Tools and Raw Materials

Varieties of tools and raw materials are used for making this traditional art. Vibrant and mild colors are used to make the painting which gives an elegant look to the products. Different sizes of brushes are used according to the designs; the brush numbers used are from size 00 to 000, which are purchased from Nepal. The cold gold or “Ser” is also purchased from Nepal. Thick cotton cloth is used for painting as it observes the color rapidly. The main colors used for painting are red, green, yellow, blue and white. The size of the metal frame used for tying the cloth depends on the size and length of the painting. The paintings are covered with a satin cloth which is red, yellow and blue in color.

### **Cotton and Silk Cloth:**

Cotton is the basic material used for making Thangka painting. The painting is made on this cloth material.

### **Cold Gold:**

Cold gold is used for the final touch, giving a glittering look to the painting.

### **Distemper:**

Distemper is used to paint on the Canvas to cover the pores.

### **Gum:**

Gum is mixed with the colors to form a paste which is applied as base for the painting. It helps the color to stick firmly on the canvas.

### **Cotton Thread:**

Cotton thread is used to tie the canvas to the frame.

### **Metal or Wooden Frame:**

Painting canvas is tied to the frame as support while painting.

### **Paint Brush:**

Paint brush's bush is made from hair of yak's tail.

### **Finishing Brush (chew):**

These are used for final touch-up made of glass, traditionally made with stone.

### **Fabric Colors:**

Fabric Colors are used for painting on cotton.

### **Enamel Paint:**

Enamel Paint is mixed in fabric color to reduce the shine.

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Different types of brushes used for paintings.

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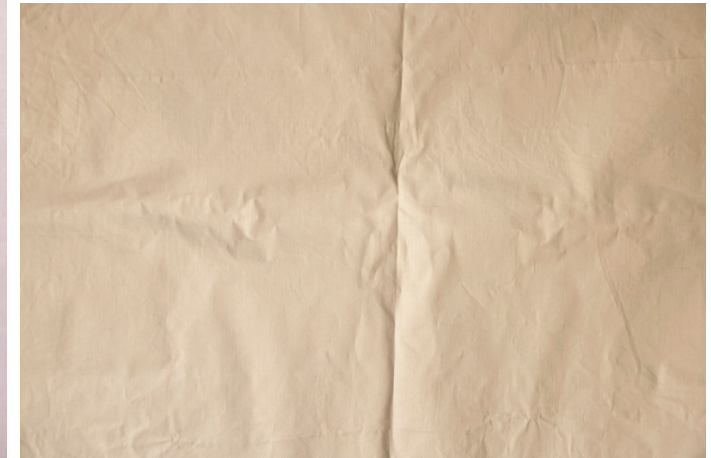
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Cold gold is applied using sharp edged tool.



Vibrant colors are used for making the paintings.



Cotton cloths are used as base for painting.

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Iron frames are used to tie the cloth stiffness.



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## Making Process

Thangka signifies iconographic information in a symbolic manner. The paintings are a picture panel used for worshipping and decorating houses. The traditional art are made on cotton or silk cloth representing Buddha and other deities. The paintings are painted and embroidered which is displayed in monastery as well as in family stand. The unique art is originated during lord Buddha's time. Every painting communicates a message and teaching about the represented deity. The paintings made on cotton or silk cloth that is very delicate in nature. The paintings are placed in a dry surrounding which does not affect the quality of silk. Thangka is also known as scroll painting.

Initially, designs are drawn on a gelatin paper using pen. The cloth is tied to an iron or wooden frame using cotton threads. To avoid pores on the cloth, a mixture of distemper and gum boiled with water is applied on the cloth before painting and dried. After drying sanding is done on the canvas surface using stone or sand paper in order to make the surface smooth and even for painting. Different parts of the designs are drawn on an A/3 size paper and they are joined to make a single image. The drawings are directly drawn on the canvas with all the measurements or traced. The first part of the painting is always started by painting the sky as a background. Commercial (enamel) paints are mixed with fabric paint solution (fabric colors) to reduce the shine of the color. Vibrant colors such as Red, Blue, Green, Yellow, and White are mainly used.

It requires perfect skills in drawing, perfect figures and great understanding of the econometric principles to make this paintings. Balanced grid of angles and intersecting lines are used to portray arms, legs, eyes, nostrils, ears, and various ritual implements and composite with the flawless design sky landscape using color saturation and shading which gives more embellished look and style to the painting, according to the theme. After tracing the colorful design on the canvas, artisan gives a final emboss golden touch to the painting. Small cold gold coins and leather gum is mixed in water (soaked to make a paste) is applied as final touch, which gives a glittering look. The gold finishing is done with a different brush called chew (local name), which has a glass fibers instead of hair. Cold gold is also known as "Ser" which is brought from China. After finalizing the painting they cover it with red and yellow satin cloth, as the color is symbolized as GOD wear. The traditional art form is basically religious that is implemented in harmony with the guidelines set in the Buddhist scriptures.

There are six themes in Thangka paintings and each theme has its own significance:

- **Minti Theme:**

More importance is given to use blue and green colors.

- **Chanti Theme:**

Light colors are used more.

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- **Kamgatti Theme:**  
Sketch based painting.

- **China getti Theme:**  
Painting through comic designs.

- **Gotti Theme:**  
Floral designs are made without making the outline floral.

- **Khamtti Theme:**  
Paintings are made using the place name as base.

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Rough sketches are drawn on gelatin paper.

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Micro tip lead pencil is used to draw the sketch for thin lines.



From the gelatin paper the design is traced on the cotton cloth (canvas).

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Brushes of appropriate size are checked/selected for using for painting purpose.



The sky is painted first as the background.



Systematic lines are painted to make the eyes, arms and legs of the figure in the painting.

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Outlining and details of the design are painted in the end to give detailing and depth.

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It takes 15 to 20 days to finish a medium sized painting.



The painting is made by skilled and proficient artisans.

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A tool with a glass piece in the tip is used to paint the outlines.

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Finished thangka painting depicting Green Tara.



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## Products

Thangka painting is mainly used for decorating the house and also for worshipping. Five years training is given to the artisan for learning the painting. The living art is transferable from the teacher to students. Skilled and proficiency artisans are involved in making this art. Small thangka paintings are used as wall hanging in house. Big Thangka Painting is painted with many different colors with very intense detailing. These big paintings have embellished the walls of the Golden Buddhist Temple at the Tibetan Settlement in Bylakuppe.

Cost of Thangka paintings varies from Rs. 15,000/- to 3 lakhs. It takes 20 days to complete a small painting and a month for bigger one. Sizes vary from 6x3 ft., 4x3 ft. (LxW), half imperial and full imperial are the preferred sizes for Thangka paintings.



Thangka painting depicting Mahakala.



Painting of lord Buddha with his followers.

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The paintings are covered using red and yellow cloth, which symbolizes of Gods wear and also paintings used as hall hangings in homes and monastery.



The main colors used for making the thangka paintings are red, white, blue green and yellow.

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Green colour is used majorly as it indicates the nature and active compassion of the Goddess.



Image of Green Thara (Mother of all Buddha's) with little difference of design in the background.

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A wooden box painted with thangka painting.

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## Video



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