

# Phad painting of Bhilwara, Rajasthan

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Phad painting is a beautiful specimen of Indian cloth painting which has its origin in Rajasthan. The Phad paintings of Rajasthan are basically the cloth painting which is done on scroll of cloth known as "Phad".

The Rajasthani Phad (sometimes spelled Par) is a visual accompaniment to a ceremony involving the singing and recitation of the deeds of folk hero deities in Rajasthan, a desert state in the west of India. Phad painting is a type of scroll painting. The smaller version of Phad painting is called Phadhye. The oldest Phad painting available belonged to late 19<sup>th</sup> century or early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Themes of the phad painting:

The Phad that display the heroic exploits of gods and many Rajput warrior are generally of five kinds namely, Pabuji, Devenarayan, Krishna, Ramdal (Ramayana) and Ramdeji, of these the most legendary and popular is that of Pabuji, who is considered a demi god in Marwar, even today.

Phad paintings are done by family of painters of Bhilwara in Rajasthan. The themes, usually depicting historic tales of Rajput chieftains are painted on long cloth lengths. The outlines of the paintings are first drawn in black and later filled with colours. In regards the nature of this art, it may be said that among the various schools of art e.g. Ajanta, Mughal, Kangra, Kishangarh, Bundi, Nathdwara, Rajput etc., which have more or less qualities in common, Phad painting is something unique and appealing in its own way.

The main theme of Phad painting was to illustrate the heroes of Goga Chauhan, Prithviraj Chauhan, Amar Singh Rathore, Teja ji and many others were illustrated on the Phadas in the earlier times but today the stories from the life of Pabuji and Narayandevji are primarily depicted. While, Phadas display the stories of Ram Krishnadala, Bhainsasura and Ramdev.

The legends are painted on long rectangular cloths that may be 35 feet long by 5 feet wide for Devnarayan Phad and 15 feet by 5 feet for Pabuji-ki Phad (Fig. 1 and 2).



### Story of Pabuji :

The Pabuji epic follows the life and adventure of Pabuji, a Rajput chieftain/brigand loosely placed in fourteenth century, whose elder brother Buroji ruled at Kolu. The Pabuji story features episodes called “*Pavaros*”. Pabuji sets up his own court nearby with his loyal followers who include three Rajput and one Raika from lowly camel herding caste. The brothers are in frequent conflict with the Khichi rulers of Jayal. Once they had dispute over a hare hunting with Khichi. Even tactical alliance, in which they marry their sister Pema to the ruler Jindrav Khichi, is ultimately of no use. Among the many adventures of the Pabuji, one taken him across the seas to Lanka where Ravana lives, for Pabuji has promised to bring the special red-brown camels of Lanka to give his niece as a wedding gift. On the way to Lanka, Pabuji passes through the kingdom of Umarkot, whose princess falls in love with him. He reluctantly agrees to marry her. Pabuji also has dealing with woman, called *Deval*, a cattle and horse breeder from whom Pabuji acquires a magical black mare *Kesar Kalami*. This mare had been promised to Jindrav, who is infuriated and in retaliation he punishes Deval by stealing her cattle. Pabuji is honour-bound to rescue Deval's cattle and abandons his wedding ceremony to do so. In the battle that follows Pabuji spares Jindrav's life out of consideration for his sister Pema who is Jindrav's wife; but Jindrav returns with his allies and in this second battle Pabuji, his brother Buroji, and his followers are killed. It remains for Pabuji's nephew and Buroji's son to avenge their death years later when he grew up.

### Story of Devnarayan:

The story behind the Phad of Devnarayan has two parts. The first concerns the exploits of twenty four brothers who belonged to the Bagrawat lineage of the Gurjar cattle herding caste. The second part tells the story and miracles of Lord Vishnu's incarnation, Devnarayan.

In the first part, the brothers acquire a boon of extraordinary wealth from Lord Shiva in the form of Baba Roopnath. They squander this on fine horses and cloths and donation to the poors to earn fame in the world. Their prideful acts and free spending upset the Rajput dominated social order and the king of the underworld, Raja Basak (Serpant king). Upon Basak's insistence, Lord Vishnu arranges for the brothers to be annihilated, but only after vowing to take incarnation in.

Their households after they are gone. The goddess coordinates the brothers' destruction when she caused a federation of Rajput rulers to rise against the brothers. After this war, little more than the chief brother's wife (*Sadu*), four sons, and their great herd of cattle remain.

In second part, Vishnu incarnated as Devnarayan comes to *Sadu*, and when *Ravji* (Rajput ruler) tries to kill the infant, she flees to her father's home in far away Malwa. Their

Devnarayan spends his childhood involved in boyish pranks reminiscent of the child Krishna. This changes when his caste genealogist (*Chochu Bhat*) appears and tells Devnarayan about the fate of twenty four Bagrawat brothers. Against his mother's wishes, Devnarayan leaves Malwa to find his four surviving cousin-brothers and lead them to the victory against their father's foes. One by one, Devnarayan reunites his cousin brothers and avenges the twenty four brothers by killing or punishing their enemies. In the end, Devnarayan establishes his cult and departs to heaven.

### Details of Phad:

The paintings are shaped in all sizes from miniature to middle and large sizes. A traditional Phad is approximately thirty feet long and five feet wide and the material used is khadi silk, cotton cloth and canvas. Primarily only vegetable colours were used, which remained fast and fresh for a long duration.

### Colour used:

Primarily, only vegetable colours and minerals colours were used in Phad paintings which remained fast and fresh for along duration. Scarcity of these colours, however, would have ultimately led to a virtual stagnation of the craft, so the artists were compelled to make innovations. Thus, the usage of water-proof earthen colours evolved. These colours are made by pounding the natural earthen colours with gum, water and indigo. Though, in present time, synthetic colours have also gained prominence (Fig. 3).



### Preparation of colours:

Pigments are ground by hand and mixed with water and gum light yellow (*pilla, hartal*) is made from yellow orpiment, which fades away over time. It is used to sketch all the figures and structures. The orange (*munjo barno*) or saffron (*kesriya*) colour used to paint faces and flesh is made by mixing red lead oxide (*sindur*) with same yellow powder

(orpimat hartal) available in the market. Green (hara) is made from verdigris (jangal), acetate of copper. Brown (geru) is purchased from the market in powder form. Vermilion (hinglu, la) is produced by pulverizing chunks of cinnabar (mercury sulfide). Some times it is mixed with red oxide (sindur) to cut costs. Black (kala, syahi) is used to outline the detail of all figures. It is obtained either by burning coconut or indigo that is commercially available.

The colour orange is used for limbs and torso, yellow for ornaments, clothing and designs, gray for structure, blue for water and curtains, green for trees and vegetation and red prominently for dress. The subtle black for outline.

### Technique of Phad painting:

Phad painting is done by people of special caste- Chippa also called Joshis' belong to Shahpura, District of Bhilwara in Rajasthan. The traditional skills of painting phad are typically handed down from father to son.

The first stroke of the brush is done by a virgin girl who is a member of the painter's family or a member of a high caste family.

Chippa draws the initial free hand sketch (chaknadena) on a coarse and starches white cloth with a non-permanent yellow colour initially known as Kacha. After that, the face and the figures are painted with a saffron colour (munda banana). Colors are applied in the following sequence green, brown, vermilion, sky blue and finally black (Fig. 4).



One interesting tradition about the Phad painting is that painter does not paint eyes of the painting until he hands that over to Bhopa (from Bhopa caste, who specializes in singing different folk tales). At the time of handing over cloth painting to him, painter gives the final touch to the painting by drawing the eyes of the character concerned. At this time, he also adds the name of Bhopa and the date on the painting. Bhopas in a group of two or three sing the tales illustrated in

the Phads and musical tribute is paid to the hero.

### Performing the Phad painting:

The folk epics are known as Pabuji ki phad and Devnarayan ki phad. Their performance affords excellent opportunity to test the definition of folklore. Phad denotes a large cloth scroll on which the legend of Pabuji and Devnarayan is painted. The performance signifies Phad bachna "Narration of the legend"

With help of painting which involves the exposition and explanation of the painting to the audience through the songs, dance and instrumental music (Fig. 5).



The Bhopas (priest) are narrator, singers and dancers. The Phad Bhopa performs the epics with the help of his wife, bhopin. Bhopas use the Ravanhatta or jantar accompanies the songs, though so use earthen drums. Ravanhatta is fiddle like instrument, Ravanhatta is played with a horsehair bow which has small bell attached. While performing, the Bhopa wears a red bage (skirt), safa (turban) and a red bagatari (a long skirt) and ties Ghunghroo (anklets with bells) to his ankles.

Bhopa is the main singer who presents the Phad to audience with explanations and poetic narrations. Performance of the Phad begins in the often pitched at a central place of the village.

During the performance, the performer's assistance illuminates certain parts of the painting with the oil lamp and performer recounts the epic with the songs and dance to the accompaniment of musical instrument, the performer serves as priest by employing the paintings as mobile shine.

After making all arrangements for the performance, the Bhopa begins to sing lura (hymes) to hero God. The recitation and singing continue all night long. The audience, which knows many of the words of the epic, may join the Bhopa in the singing. Just before dawn, the ceremony ends and the Phad is rolled up.

Used in this manner, Phad paintings wear out after several years of service. When this happens, the painting is ritually destroyed by immersion in a body of water. Ideally,

the immersion takes place in the holy Pushkar Lake and this ceremony is known as “Thandi Karna”.

#### Present scenario:

These paintings were traditionally used as cloth hangings at Vaishnava temples by the nomadic group of Bhopas, the Pichwais. The artist who works on them considers himself to be the servant of the Lord and puts in devotion on each Pichwai or Phad that he paints. Nowadays, this art form is also done for commercial use.

#### Conclusion:

Since the Phad paintings currently don't find much usage on textiles/ fashion apparel, except as a few decorative painted wall panels, greeting cards etc. the art needs to be popularized in order to preserve its reminiscent beauty by adapting it on textiles. The folk art and the traditional ideas that are the glitters of our culture, when applied on apparels, by a commercial aspect is gaining popularity. Phad painting can be displayed for interior decoration of residence. Govt. offices, Secretariats. Public libraries, Town halls, all

educational institutions and above all Foreign embassies, Museums and Five star hotels.

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