

# Mewar Paintings: An exploratory study

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Mewar painting has its distinct and unique style whilst representing the hills, colours and palaces of Rajasthan. The objective of present study was to know about type of colours or pigments thickening or binding agents used for making different types of traditional painting of mewar and the problems faced by the artisans making different types of paintings. Thirty artisans were purposively selected for the purpose. The results revealed that majority of the artisans were making paintings from more than a decade. Themes commonly used in Mewar paintings are based on *Ramayana*, *Krishna Lila*, *Choura Panchasika*, *Ragamala series* and *Gita Govinda*. The pigments used in paintings are *sendur* (Mercuric-Sulphide), *Hinglu* (Cinnabar-Mercuric Sulphide) *Rav Sena* (yellow-ochre), *Jangal* (verdigris-copper acetate), *Safeda* (Zinc White), Neel (Indigo), *Geru* (red ochre), *Syahi* (lamp Black), *Asmani/Lazvardi* (lapis lazuli) and precious stones, conch shells, pure gold and silver. It took as long as several months to prepare the colours and prepare one painting. Only few artisans are using traditional method of preparing colour, new entrant in the field are using readymade colours. Problem faced by them were mainly related to eye irritation, pain at shoulder, back, fingers, wrist and skin allergy at hands.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Mewar paintings, Techniques, Pigments /colours used, Binders, Thickeners used

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Rajasthan, land of amazing legends of romance and heroism, a region in the north-west corner of the sub-continent is of breathtaking beauty- packed with history, art and culture that goes back several centuries. Mewar role in the development of Rajasthan's art is very important. One of the most creative and remarkable example of Mewar art treasures is the world of paintings. The traditional Art and Crafts of Mewar survived and developed because it is regarded as material symbols of Mewar's unique cultural ethos. Mewar paintings are practiced and marketed in Mewar and the tradition has been so natured by the artisans that their products win the acclaim and appreciation all over the world. The objective of present study is to know about type of colours or pigments thickening or binding agents used for making different types of traditional painting of Mewar and the problems faced by the artisans making different types of paintings.

## ■ RESEARCH METHODS

The present study was conducted in Udaipur city to

know about type of colours or pigments thickening or binding agents used for making different types of traditional painting of Mewar and the problems faced by the artisans making different types of paintings. To fulfill the objectives of the study total thirty artisans were purposively selected who are making any type of traditional paintings. Structured interview schedule and personal interview technique was used to collect the data. Data was analysed using frequency and percentage.

## ■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the present investigation as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under following heads :

### General information of the respondents :

The data collected on age of respondents revealed that sixty per cent of respondents belonged to the 30-40 year of age group. However 30 per cent respondents belonged to 40 and above years of age group. 43.33 per cent belonged to

general caste. Equal per cent had medium and large family size (40%).

The data pertaining to education revealed that all the respondents were educated. 36.67 per cent of the respondents were graduated while nearly 27 per cent respondents were higher secondary pass. Forty per cent of respondents belonged to income range of Rs. 10,000- 20,000 per month followed by ten Per cent respondents in the range of above Rs. 20,000 Per month. Remaining 26.6 per cent respondents belonged to income range of Rs. 5,000- 10,000 per month. Majority of the respondents were married. Painting was the sole source of income 53.33 per cent while rest were also working as tourist guide and doing service.

It is apparent from the table that 33.33 per cent respondents were found to be associated with this craft for more than 20 years, and 50 per cent respondents from last 10-20 years. Remaining 6.67 per cent respondents were associated with this craft from last 10 year. It shows that all the respondents were practicing this craft from more than one decade.

It was found that one third of the respondents (33.33 %) spent 8-10 hours in a day, followed by 40 per cent respondents who worked 6-8 hours per day.

For majority of the respondents that art of painting is their ancestral work. While interviewing the respondents, it was found that they had not undergone any special training to learn this art and all the skills of profession had been acquired from their family members like father, elder brothers and each artist trained by the method of learning by doing. Thus it can be said that the art of painting is practiced by family members and taught to next generation by elder member of family. It was revealed that 73.33 per cent respondents were inspired from their family occupation and rest 26.67 per cent respondents were inspired by themselves due to their own interest and choose this art as their profession.

Regarding type of paintings made it was revealed that 37.70 per cent were making miniature painting 30 per cent wall painting, 33.33 per cent Pichwai and 37.70 per cent all the paintings. It was reported by the painters that if they receive the order they can make all the type of paintings.

#### **Themes commonly used in different types of painting:**

Cent per cent respondents reported that commonly used themes of Painting are court scenes, scenes of dancing, music parties, gardens, forests, palaces, hills, valleys, life of lord Krishna, love Scenes, hunting scenes, animal fights etc. Paintings are mostly inspired from *Raslela*, *Ragmala*, *Geeta Govinda*, *Ramanayana* and *Bagvat Purana*. and various other festivals like Holi, Diwali, Durga pooja, and Dassehra were painted.

#### **Process of painting :**

It is standard procedure for painting, cent per cent

artisans used this process. Researcher observed that artists used following common steps *i.e.*

The support needs to be absorbent, strong and flexible for a good quality painting. For this purpose Khadi was used in ancient times which was later shifted to machine made cotton cloth. The basic requirement of the fabric was that it should be loose, which means it is not tightly woven. The reason being that when a tightly woven cloth is used for painting, the paint along with the adhesive doesn't seep in the fibres properly thereby giving lack of adhesion. Whereas a loosely woven cloth will provide enough space within the fibres for colours and sizing to penetrate easily giving a good adhesion.

Once the cloth is selected, it is sized with maida (fine wheat flour paste). In the absence of maida only wheat flour was also used as a sizing material. Sizing was also done with Ararot. It was also reported by some of the artist that a small amount of animal glue (Sares), obtained from camel's skin, was also added to the sizing material and the addition of which gave good strength to the cloth and also help to keep it straight, sizing is applied to cover the irregularities of the cloth. There are two main functions of sizing; the first being that it prevents colours running into each other and do not bleed, secondly, it is applied to make the cloth wrinkle free, as a smooth surface is essential for the easy movement of brush and to obtain the uniformity of colours. Once the sizing is dry, which takes two to three hours. It is then kept flat on the work surface for the initial drawing.

The next step is the preparation of the sketch. The painter makes a primary sketch of the figure outlines on a piece of paper/ fabric. These are then corrected and made bolder and more accurate. Thereafter, the sketch is traced on the tracing paper, and the outlines are lightly punctured. This stencil sorts is placed over a fresh piece of paper, and rubbed with a black pigment, such that the ink gets transferred to the paper through the pinholes. The dotted outline on the paper is then darkened with a paintbrush.

The next stage is the application of colour. First the human figures are painted. This is followed by the painting of animals and other components of the picture. The background is painted at last. Once the colours are applied, the embellishment begins. Floors, carpets, human figure are beautifully adorned with intricate detailing. Then, the outline of the figures is highlighted with a darker pigment. The penultimate step is the application of gold highlight, to give an appearance of richness.

Burnishing is the last stage. After the Painting is dried it is covered with butter paper and rubbed with a smooth oval shaped shell piece. The Painting surface becomes smooth and acquires a luster. There is an increase in the demand for an antique look. To antique the work, the artist uses potassium permanganate to dull the colours, resulting in an old-worn out look. The Painting is laid face down on a hard

surface, and an agate stone is used to stroke it firmly. This gives the Painting a uniform texture.

#### Binding agents used in making painting :

Tamarind seed gum has been extensively used as a binding medium for cloth paintings. Tamarind gum is obtained by dipping the seeds in water and left over night. The outer

covering of the seed is swelled and is peeled off. The seeds are then dried, ground to powder and again are soaked in water for one night. The seed powder becomes soft. They are then blended on a stone to a smooth paste, which is cooked with a certain amount of water until it forms a thick paste. It has a property to lumps and probably due to this thickening property; it has been extensively used as a binding medium for pigments

Table 1 : General information of the respondents				(n=30)	
Sr. No.	Aspects	Categories	No. of respondents		
			Frequency	Percentage	
1.	Age (in years)	20-30	5	6.67	
		30-40	16	53.33	
		40 and above	9	30.00	
2.	Caste	SC/ST	7	23.33	
		Backward (OBC)	10	33.33	
		General	13	43.33	
3.	Family type	Nuclear	16	53.33	
		Joint	14	46.67	
	Family size	Small (up to 4 members)	6	20.00	
Medium (5-8 members)		12	40.00		
Large (8 or more members)		12	40.00		
4.	Education	upto Primary	5	6.67	
		upto Middle	6	20.00	
		upto metric	-	-	
		upto higher sec. school	8	26.6	
		Graduate and above	11	36.67	
5.	Monthly income (Rs.)	upto 5000	-	-	
		5000-10000	8	26.6	
		10000-20000	12	40.00	
		above 20000	10	33.33	
6.	Marital status	Unmarried	3	10.0	
		Married	27	90.0	
7.	Family occupation	Painting	16	53.33	
		Tourist guide + painting	8	26.67	
		Services + painting	6	20.00	
		Others			
9.	Work experience	Past 10 years	5	6.67	
		More than 10 years	15	50.00	
		More than 20 years	10	33.33	
10.	Duration (hours/day)	8-10 hours	10	33.33	
		6-8 hours	12	40.00	
		Less than 6 hours	8	26.67	
11.	Interest in painting	Inherent	22	73.33	
		Developed	8	26.67	
12.	Type of paintings made	Miniature painting	10	33.30	
		Silk painting	9	30.00	
		Pichawai painting	10	33.3	
		All the painting	11	37.70	

### Pigments used in making different types of painting :

Cent per cent respondents reported that earlier mineral pigments, organic dyes, precious and real gold and silver powder were used. The majority of colours in the palette came from minerals or natural salts. Some minerals were obtained in fine powders, while others were found in stone, which had to be pulverized in fine dust to obtain colours. Gold as a substance recognized almost universally as a symbol of wealth and beauty, and was highly priced as a pigment by both artist and patrons Information collected on material used to prepare colour is documented below

- Red Lead (*Sindur* – Orange)
- Kesari - Saffron
- Ultramarine (*Lajward or Rajwarta.*)
- Indigo (*Neel*)
- Azurite (*Asmani or Halka Neela*)
- Malachite (*Dana farang*)
- Tere Verte (*Haradhawa*) Green Earth.
- Vermilion or Cinnabar (*Hinglu*)
- Verdigris (*Zangal*)
- Yellow Ochre (*Ramraj, Rav Sena*).
- Indian Yellow (*Piyori*).
- White (*Safeda*).
- Red ochre or red earth (*Geru or Hirmich*)
- Orpiment or King's Yellow (*Harital or Pilo*)
- Black (*Siyahi*) made from lampblack, charcoal black and graphite.

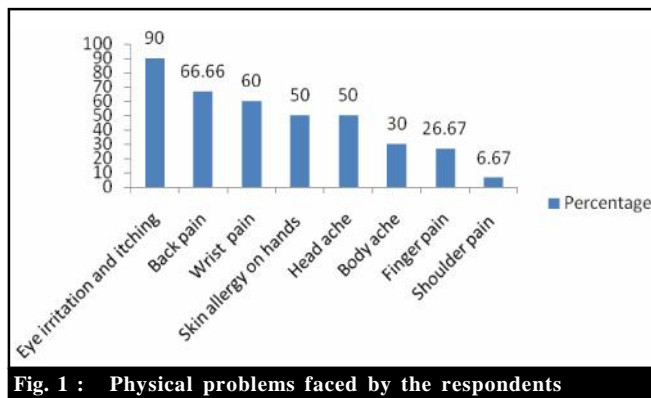
But now a day's artisans are using the readymade colours being low cost, readily available and easy to use and very few artisans are using the handmade traditional natural pigments to obtain the colours.

### Physical problems faced by the artisans :

The researcher tried to identify the physical problems faced by respondents. Ninety per cent respondents revealed that problem of eye irritation persist while repeatedly working in dim light when there is more work pressure.

Table shows that most of the respondents faced eye irritation and itching during painting work followed by wrist pain (60%). Other common problems were head ache (50%)

Sr. No.	Physical problem	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Eye irritation and itching	27	90.0
2.	Wrist pain	18	60.0
3.	Head ache	15	50.0
4.	Back pain	20	66.66
5.	Finger pain	08	26.67
6.	Shoulder pain	06	6.67
7.	Body ache	9	30.0
8.	Skin allergy on hands	15	50.0



and finger pain (26.67%). Half of the respondents also faced skin allergy on hand it may be due to use of synthetic colours or washing of hands repeatedly and frequently by soap.

Two third of the respondents faced back pain. Back pain may be because of muscle get tight as a result of their restricted movement when the person sits in flexed position with hip bent this part of muscle on the front of the hip is in shortened position and muscle on the back of hip in lengthened position, over the time can result in muscle imbalance with shortened muscle becoming tight and lengthened muscle becoming weak. Many respondent gets poor posture with forward rounded shoulders as observed during data collection. The respondents also felt stiffness in neck, back, and joints due to prolong sitting in poor posture.

Cent per cent of respondents revealed their dissatisfaction with the market demand of Painting. Painting work, like many forms of art, is gradually losing its grace and demands. As most of the Painting are made on order and demand of the customers for export purpose, the domestic requirement of these paintings is limited to a particular strata of the society. Hence, there is need to revive this beautiful craft before it lose its glory.

### Conclusion :

Thus, it can be concluded that most of the artisans were in age group of 30-35 years. Regarding family structure and education, most of the artisans were graduate and living in joint family, their monthly income ranged between Rs. 10,000-20,000. Majority of the respondents were found to be associated with this craft from more than 10 years. As far as all the respondents accepted that painting is their ancestral work. They spent more than work 8-10 hours per day for painting. Almost all the respondents reported that earlier only natural pigment colours were used but due to tedious process of making natural colour most of artisans are using readymade colours available in market. Major problem faced by them were eye irritation, back ache, neck ache, shoulder ache, wrist and skin allergies.

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