

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of the Book: A Place Apart, Paintings in Kutch, 1720-1820

Overview-

Forty years back when natives of this land and across had comfortably forgotten about the artistic contribution of this region, it was Dr. Goswamy and Dr. Dallapiccola who re-introduced this unfamiliar painting tradition, through a group of 'Durbar paintings', which they discovered with Mr. H.M. Fuest, an Art dealer in Germany. An article was published in *Artibus Asiae*,¹⁶ drawing credits to these newly discovered paintings, tracing their history, and exploring the various possibilities. While studying the material the scholars had a clear understanding that there could be more to this school which could reveal a complete understanding of this school and style. Within the same year, yet another article¹⁷ was published by the two authors with much confirmation as they worked on the 'Landscape group of paintings' of the same region.

This long-forgotten tradition of painting was brought to light to the concerned readers in India in the year 1983, when the two scholars published a book titled, 'A Place Apart-Paintings in Kutch, 1720-1820'. By then most of the paintings considered under study in the publication had got scattered from Mr. H.M. Fuest's possession to new private owners across Europe- belonging to Dortmund, Mannheim, Heidelberg, Berlin, and others. A crucial point that is being noted here is if not for this publication, no Indians would have ever had a chance to know about these valuable paintings.

Structure of the book- The book has three major chapters, which comprehensively gather concerned information- speculate, and narrow downs to a convincing conclusion. It

¹⁶ Goswamy B.N, and Dallapiccola A.L, '*Painting in Kutch, Preliminary notes on a Group of Miniatures*', *Artibus Asiae* Vol.XL, No.1.

¹⁷ Goswamy B.N, and Dallapiccola A.L, '*More painting from Kutch: much confirmation, some surprises*', *Artibus Asiae* Vol.XL, No.4.

has an image catalogue of thirty colour plates and thirty-seven black and white images with a physical and descriptive catalogue for each towards the end.

Chapter 1, titled ‘A Place Apart’, discusses in brief about uniqueness and individuality of the land of Kutch. The appearance of the land on a map like that of a tortoise, the clear sole identity of its inhabitance, their distinguished craft, dialect, currency, surviving animals, migratory birds, adventurous and impressive navigators, bustling ports, and how it remained open to the outside world. Some of the remarks on the land of Kutch by the English Agents and English visitors – like Lieutenant Burnes, Lieutenant Raikes, Rushbrook Williams, and Lieutenant Leech, on the land, are also stated in this chapter.

Chapter 2, titled ‘Many a Strand’, covers the political history of Kutch. This chapter also introduces the royal characters and places of prominence, concerning its appearance in painting. The discussion on paintings begins with the earliest representation of a Kutch ruler, Rao Bharmal I, in a Mughal painting, from the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.¹⁸ Similarly, he also shares another interesting representation of Rao Bharmal by a Mughal artist Govardhan. Accounting for the value of Mughal paintings, the appearance of Rao Bharmal of Kutch in a Mughal court painting would have been a matter of importance. The discussion takes one further to familiarize with the prominent characters in the painting. The author discuss the popular rulers who had contributed to the painting tradition- like Rao Desal, Rao Lakhpat, Rao Godh, and Rao Raydhan. Alongside these rulers, there are also discussions at length on the appearance of certain Noble men/ prominent characters like the Siddi, bard, and Menkand Mirji, who makes an appearance in the paintings. Absents of women in these representations, like Nayikas and Raginis of popular romances, are noted in this section. As mentioned above the discussion further leads to the prominent places in Kutch. The most frequently depicted city in the painting is the capital city of Bhuj. With all the reasons that they had been the seat of the Raos and abode of the painters and subsequently, the bustling town of Anjar, Mandvi, Mundra, and Lakhpat were discussed.

¹⁸ Goswamy B.N, and Dallapiccola A.L , A Places Apart- Paintings in Kutch, 1720-1820, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983, Pg 17, ref: Ananda K Coomaraswamy, notes on Indian painting, Bishan Das and others, Artibus Asiae, Vol 2, 1927.

Having introduced to the popular figures and prominent places, the author gets to the core of the chapter i.e. the paintings in themselves.

Chapter 3, titled '*Many a Hue*', is the core chapter that describes the paintings in detail covering their source, absorption, and departures. This chapter discusses in great length paintings documented by them analyzing them technically and formally. The classification of these paintings is broadly done in two phases which are termed as an 'impulse' by the author. The first impulse covers the Portrait and Durbar scenes- Court paintings of Jadeja rulers from Rao Desal I, Rao Lakhpat, and Rao Godh to Rao Raydhan II. The second impulse discusses the Landscapes paintings.

The first impulse: Portraits and Darbar scenes according to the authors is 'Many a hue'. There seems to be no period of preparation, no slow growth toward maturity, and no record of families of painters. Infact, based on the visuals available only a stylistic speculation could be drawn, as to how the impulse of these paintings could have come from the outside, outside here means the neighboring provincial states, here two main centres of Rajasthan, like Mewar and Jodhpur are closely allied with based on the visuals. The author has expressed with confidence that the commissioning of these paintings must have begun from Rao Desal I (1718-1741) time and continued till around 1820. The whole body of portrait paintings that they could manage for their study draws attention to mainly three personages Rao Lakhpat, Rao Godh, and Rao Raydhan II. After his period the ability to execute self-portraits and interest to depict large procession scenes seems to have declined. And the later works are referred to as having less significance to the tradition. The historical, political, and matrimonial relation of Rao's family with the Rajput of Rajasthan is elaborately discussed, which could have possibly led to the connection with Udaipur and Jodhpur states resulting in the influence. The absence of the Gujarati style is mentioned by the author.

The second impulse: Discussed in this section is an obvious and well-documented group of **Landscape paintings**. Although none of the landscapes are dated, discussion reveals that they seem to have been produced sometime from 1775 to 1820. Before discussing landscapes at length there is a discussion on European prints which were referral

works to the artist who produced the Kutch landscapes. How a sizably large group of prints must have reached Kutch during the 18th century which was collected and duplicated by the local artist is a matter of surprise. It is believed that it is by studying these European views, which instilled an interest in the local painters to paint their surroundings. The author speculates on the channel of the coming of the European prints which seems to be the British employees of the company. The author has also listed down some of the prominent agents of those times like: the English Doctor who came to treat the Rao's mother, Lieutenant Burnes, Dr. J Burnes, Captain Mac Murdo, Captain Gardner, Colonel Lake, Captain Walter, Lieutenant Rakies and Lieutenant Leech. The other popular source could have been the always-remembered Ramsingh Malam of Saurashtra, who was patronized by Rao Lakhpat, in his court. It is to him we credit all early creative attributions like architecture art and crafts. Infact some of the prints depicting interiors make you want to agree with the author that it is Ramsingh who could have shown interest in bringing the prints to Kutch. These European prints include mostly the etching and engravings of the 18th and 19th century. The 18th century is the one which are large in numbers, and covers subjects like Italian cities, buildings, and parks in England, and interiors of building with one-point perspectives. The author has described in great detail how each of these original prints is preserved: remounted on a new Indian *warshi* with additional labels and notes. Labels are in English and many times in Devnagari scrip with elaborate notes. The two scholars are quite certain here with their speculation that it is the duplicating of these large number of 18th century European prints, which inspired the artist to study some of the views of Kutch.

The landscape is a very unique phase, most significant in the context of Indian Painting. The city of Bhuj appears to be one of the favorites among artists. Bhujiya hill, Hamir sagar, the closer view of buildings, Raos palace, lake view are some of the fine spots covered. Apart from Bhuj, the painter seems to relish painting views of popular ports like Anjar, Mundra, Mandvi, and Jakhau. The absence of the popular port of Mandvi is noted. The painter has also moved out of Kutch to depict popular places of interest- like the view of Dwaraka, Morvi, in Surat the garden of Rustam Parsi. Some other views of interest are: the shrine of a Pir standing atop a sandy hill, the shrine of Hajji Karmani, and the little place of Rawal Pir. Alongside these views, the author also disuses some of the technical difficulties faced by the painter in execution. Like, as portraying a seated figure, or the

difficulty in applying a thin layer of pigment using gouache. Architectural details are unusually based on observation.

The author concludes the second impulse by stating that, it is difficult to say anything useful about when this kind of work began: all that could note was that the European prints which provided the stimulus and many of which are datable, could have come in only around 1750 or so. Likewise for marking the end of the landscape phase, they have nothing to go by, except the detail that the walled towns in the paintings show no sign of the damage they suffered in the earthquake of 1819. It is possible that by this time the Kamangars just faded away or that, with the arrival of the British, new winds began to blow in Kutch.

Towards the end, the author briefly touches on the painters of Kutch by supporting with a visual reference from their Durbar collection (refer to Pl III in the book), which identifies a character inscribed as Kamagar, to whom the painting tradition may be affiliated.

Areas of Issues or Gaps in the Research:

Two major gaps in the research already addressed by the two authors are, (1) the limited range of collection they could have had access to for their study. The author comments. “But a point that needs to be restated here is that in the fairly large group of Kutch paintings that we have had access to, we have not seen the wide range of themes that we associate with paintings from other major centres of India. For Instance, with one exception, we have not seen any Illustration of the sacred text: there are no Markandeya Purana, no Ramayana, no Mahabharata, and no Gita Govinda illustrations. Nor are any historical works seen. Krishna does not make an appearance nor Radha in these miniatures, the Nayak-nayika themes, the Ragamalas, the Baramasas, illustrations to rhetoric Hindi poetry, the Satsai, Rasika-priya, the Sundara-shringara, the like are all conspicuously absent. In fact, it is striking how male-dominated these paintings from Kutch are. Female figures which naturally appear in large numbers when the painters treat elsewhere of themes such as the Gita-govinda the Ragamala, the Nayak-nayika bheda, etc are rarely seen.”

And (2) when the author comments, “In contrast to what was happening elsewhere in the later eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries in the domain of ‘Company’ work, the work of copying from European models or learning from them seems to have been unaided in Kutch. No European or English painters, professional or amateur, were apparently at hand to advise the painter; professional or amateur, were apparently at hand to advise the painter; nor could he watch him at work. The transfer of skills and ideas was achieved by the painter unaided. The technique doesnot change: we do not see any water colours, so ubiquitous in the English-dominated nineteenth century work, in this group; and the slow sometimes unsure way in which perspective is picking up or cast shadows are taken over, indicates the lone road that the Kutch painter was traversing while learning. The observation was his only guide.” The two authors comments further how the work from Kutch also differs from much nineteenth century ‘Company’ work in its range of subjects. There is no interest here at all in those long series of professions, trades or customs, and ceremonies that figure so prominently in Company production. The Uniform of Soldiers, the doing of fakirs, and the strange customs seems to hold no interest for the Kutch painter.

However, it would have been also interesting to know how such a relevant collection reach Europe? Where the royal portrait painting was ever sold by the family. How did Mr. H.M. Fuest procure the collection in the first place? Was it when the Rao participated in the 1851 Exhibition that these works moved out, or when the English guest collected them at some point in time.

Views held by other Scholars on the Publication

Historian, Mildred Archer has given a Review ¹⁹ on this publication, in which he expresses his agreement on most of the issues discussed. But also raises his strong opinion by stating that: *these paintings appear somewhat provincial in style. Rather than a minor offshoot of Mewar or Marwar painting, states with which the Kutch rulers had matrimonial links. If these had been the only Kutch paintings to appear, they would have been of historical interest but of no great aesthetic importance.* Although the article further

¹⁹ Archer, M., *Review of A Place Apart: Painting in Kutch, 1720-1820.*, Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland, Vol 118 (1), 1986, Pp.143-144.

expresses excitement and delight in the Landscape works which were strongly influenced by European prints.

Another critique **Mayer A**, who reviews the book ²⁰ in a Bulletin of Oriental and African studies comments that, ‘it is a pity, however, that they did not take the opportunity of discussing those Kutch paintings still displayed on the walls of the Aaina Mehal, which include several individual and equestrian portraits, durbar scenes, European prints, and their Kutch copies, and reverse paintings on glass’. Infact the critique suggests that some of the Aaina Mehal portraits and Durbar scenes also show strong nineteenth-century European influence which is not taken up in the research.

Critical Observations:

At several instances, we feel the author has had a close reference to many more relevant materials from this region but has moved all information to footnotes so that they need not deviate from the two broad stylistic impulses that the methodology is framed in. Infact, as they came across these visuals, they must have understood the stylistic complexity that this region’s painting tradition had to offer. These references are: 1) Chapter 1, ref. 5: the birds of Kutch have attracted the attention of many eminent ornithologists including H Palin, G Archer, and Salim Ali. Even in the main body of text, he talks of an English Doctor who came to treat the Raos mother, as a possible contributor to the tradition but hesitates to address him as Hendry Pitmen. Hendry Pitmen in fact was an amateur ornithologist who engaged the local artist to join his bird documentation project during his stay in Kutch.²¹

Author Stuart Welch Cary in his publication in 1976 ²², had published some of the Hendry Pitmen portrait collections made by the local Kutch artist. The second instance is in (Chapter two, reference 14), which gives portrait painting references by Ramsinghji Rathod²³, V.L Devkar, and U.P.Shah²⁴. The third time is when he gives the reference

²⁰ Archer, M. (1986), *Ibid*.

²¹ MacLennan Heather, *Shot Near Bhuj, Indian Birds from Kutch*, Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, 2010

²² *Ibid*.

²³ Rathod Ramsingh, *Kutch and Rama Randh* (english), Bharatiya Sanskruti Foundation, Bhuj, 1993

²⁴ Bhaumik S K, *Art Culture and Natural-history of Kutch*, Vol XXVI, Museum and Picture gallery, Vadodara, 1977.

(Chapter 3, reference 20) of a Bhagawata Purana text from the private collection of Amit Ambalal in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Fourth is the portrait of Rao Desalji II, which reproduces in Bombay selections (Chapter 3 reference 21). Lastly the very interesting Muharam scroll by painter Arab Ali Mohammed (Chapter 3, reference 84). Surprisingly, less attention is paid to incorporate these works. Either they state these works as bearing no relationship with the works they are familiar with. Or rather state that they are produced too late compared to the range of their study. So without much debate, they acknowledged them in the references and focused majorly on the collection that reached Europe. As I understand incorporating these arbitrary materials would have indeed challenged the methodological framework they set for the publication.

A point that needs to be address here as a critical remark is, both the authors repeatedly state their ambiguity and limitation on the range of visuals they used in their study. It is stated right in the preface that, ‘the book was published focusing on one large collection that was available to them, the possibility is also given that more material might surface someday or rather add to or modify the views that have been observed’. Infact the present research becomes very relevant today as some of the materials which they assumed in their documentation as missing is being considered in the present research.

Discussion on other Relevant Publications and Article

Yet another relevant publication that acknowledges the painting tradition from this region is ‘Kutch and Rama Randh’²⁵ by Ramsinghji Rathod. The author is a writer and contributor to folk-arts and culture of Kutch, in this book he has largely focused on giving first-hand information on the fine-arts of Kutch through the lens of lord Rama. This book has two sections, In the first session he elaborately narrates and transcribes the folk version of Ramayana known as the Rama Randh. Alongside this text, the author tried to juxtapose the Ramayana murals painted on the walls of Tera fort. In the later section, he elaborates in detail on the presence of Lord Rama thought out the cultural history of this land. The enthusiasm, the patronage, the visitors, the pilgrimage, and henceforth. The book has a lot of mixed-up information, which gives first-hand information on the various arts across the district covering local performance (folk style drama), folk painting (referred to as

²⁵ Rathod Ramsingh, 1993, *Op.cit.*

Kamangari kalam), embroidery, crafts, kutchi language, literature, numismatics, faith, and culture. What is interesting is though he has overlapped a lot of information alongside the painting tradition, he too seems to have gathered a lot of genuine materials relevant to the study. Unfortunately, he has not acknowledged the image source which would have connected with more possible leads.

Shot near Bhuj ²⁶ is an exhibition catalogue of a bird documentation project by Dr. Hendry Pitman, Assistant Surgeon to the 10th Native Infantry, who visited Kutch to treat the Rao's mother and stayed in Kutch for a year from 1847-1848. Pitman was an amateur ornithologist, who commissioned the local painters to document the wide range of bird specimens that visited the swampy marshy land of Kutch. His album covers drawings of 108 birds, of which 44 folios have the location and date inscribed. He used Latin terms and conventions in the descriptions of body parts, dimensions, plumage, and coloring. Although the labeling and description of each could be by Pitman himself, the drawing varies in style by different hands: most are fine and spirited depiction but some are highly professional in execution. It is discussed how the technique used a traditional Indian approach, rather than the academic water colour technique. The author assumes that professionals from Rao Desal-II's court must have helped the doctor in drawing the birds. Apart from these drawings, Pitman seems to have been collecting several number of paintings to encourage the painters who survived in Bhuj. We get to see some of these collections published in the **Room for Wonder**,²⁷ a book by author Stuart Cary Welch.

Another interesting catalogue of Company period painting from this region is published by Mildred Archer in **Company Drawings in the India Office Library**.²⁸ Archer in this book has shared the catalogue list of all seventy-two paintings, which illustrates the various appearances of people living in Kutch, these illustrations are on two bounded albums. Archer puts in her observations that the artist could be a local artist belonging to the Muslim community as the dates inscribed suggests that the artist is not working on Friday. Only two images selected from the album were published in the book by Archer, in

²⁶ MacLennan Heather, 2010, *Opcit.*

²⁷ Welch Stuart Cary, *Room for Wonder- Painting during the British Period 1760-1880*, 1978.

²⁸ Archer Mildred, *Company Drawings in the India Office Library*, Her Majesty's Stationary Office London, 1972, Pp.239.

the present research the whole range of illustrations is laid out to study the nature of this artistic trend in this region.

A recently published book, **Indian Life and People, in the 19th century**, by author J.P Losty, discusses a few nineteenth century Kutch paintings from the Tapi collection, Surat. Thirteen paintings from the album of Stanley Raikes dated c.1850-54 are published in the book. As informed, the Stanley Raikes album comprises a combination of miscellaneous poems and extracts, some paintings and watercolors, and one photograph of a house dated 1849.²⁹ Losty's remark on the imported paper used in one of the drawings is an essential note on the availability of such imported papers for an artist who is working in a remote area in Kutch.

Now that we are challenging ourselves to understand the contribution of Kutch painters through a broader lens, opening up the time frame from the eighteen to the early twentieth century, we cannot just limit our understanding to the works done on paper. Infact from the late eighteenth century to mid- twentieth century, the walls of residences belonging to affluent merchants were painted with colorful frescos. Unfortunately, today a great number of these painted residences do not survive and have vanished, as many collapsed during the earthquake of 2001 and many buildings got demolished as the owners migrated to bigger cities, what remains of the murals are the large number of photographs collected by Mr Pradeep Zaveri, a passionate photographer and a genuine art enthusiast, who belongs to the Kutch Bhatia family. He in the recent past found it important to share and circulate his documentation through publication. His two dedicated publications on Kutch murals are titled, **Ramayana in paintings of Kutch**³⁰ and **Kutch ni Kamangari Chitrakala**³¹. Today these publications are the only surviving visual aid and catalogue we have on the extinct mural tradition of Kutch.

²⁹ Losty J P, Indian Life and People in the 19th Century, Company Paintings in the Tapi Collection, Roli Books, 2018.

³⁰ Zaveri Pradeep, Ramayana in Paintings of Kutch, West Zone Cultural Centre, Udaipur, 2018.

³¹ Zaveri Pradeep, Kutch ni Kamangari Chitrakala, Gujarat Kala Pratishthan, Surat

Conclusion to the Review of Literature

Collecting literature reviews by other scholars we can conclude: (1) that a holistic study has not been done on this area, and (2) at some point of time in the History of Kutch, the paintings got distributed among private collectors, Museums, and Archives. For a very long time the colorful frescoes, which decorated the walls of many affluent residences survived in Kutch but unfortunately today even they do not survive.