

## Introduction

The present study titled, ‘New Documentation of Paintings from Kutch’, brings to light relevant and more recently discovered paintings of Kutch that are unpublished among the concerned readers. In my belief, the lack of proper attention given to such provincial style is the reason why paintings done in such provenance are still overshadowed by the prolific research otherwise carried out in the prominent schools of Indian miniature paintings. Certainly, these paintings do not have a very long historical base like the popular Rajput traditions, but they are not of a negligible quantity either, that we could completely overlook. Be it the Kamangari frescos or the ones done on paper the surviving evidence proves that the tradition lasted for a brief period of a hundred and fifty years, roughly from the downfall of the Mughal Empire to the establishment of the British Raj in India. Simultaneously, when it comes to realizing the fact- whether Kutch had an independent school of miniature paintings or not, a sense of uncertainty can be seen among historians and scholars. Nevertheless, when a new set of paintings surfaces, we come one step closer to establishing the fact that Kutch was an important regional centre for art and learning in Gujarat, a few centuries back.

Today in the twenty-first century people of Kutch have a faint memory of having seen “Kamangari paintings” – a popular term for frescoes done on the walls of Kutch residences during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It comes as a pleasant surprise to know that these frescoes were part of a larger traditional impulse that began in the Courts of Kutch during the eighteenth century. But unfortunately, both these art forms are fast getting extinct due to natural calamities and lack of sensitivity for it among their current owners. Although what inspires the present study are the works executed on paper, and certain parts of the study occasionally examine between miniature paintings and frescoes as the former must have had an impact on the latter.

Further, speaking of works done on paper, we are in a better position today as a good part of them continue to survive to this date despite the challenges in this area. Some of the most fabulous works of miniatures paintings are displayed on the wall of Aaina Mehal (eighteenth-century Mirror palace) at Bhuj, along with a large number of painted antiquities

that are collectible assets of the Royal family. Every part of this eighteenth-century building is a testimony of an obsession for Indo-European lifestyle, which retains the taste of the court culture then. Amongst the paintings, one would be thrilled to see the eclectic range of frames that are hung on the walls of this palace. A wide range of portraits appears belonging to eighteenth-century British, Flemish and Italian personnel. Then contemporary Rajput kings like- Rana Ranjit Singh, Raja Bhagat Singh; and the popular Mughal portraits- of Babar, Humayun, Akbar, and Jahangir. There are a large number of reverse glass paintings in the collection which is very hard not to notice. Occasionally a Pichhwai would appear from nowhere. The framed Mughal Farman's are a treat to historians which are preliminary references to establishing the Jadeja's good relationship with the Mughals. Apart from this range, there are several paintings that are very hard to attribute to the popular schools of Indian miniatures. Amongst these, in a corridor next to the hall of mirrors, are hung the portraiture of the Jadeja rulers, whose love for art, sow the seed of paintings in the mind of Kutchis, during the mid-eighteenth century. The present study does not limit to royal portraiture from the Aaina Mehal collection but also traces more such works which were once part of the tradition, but got scattered at some point in time for reasons unknown. The group of miniatures that reached Germany with Mr. H M Fuest is studied and published by Dr. B N Goswamy and Dr Anna Dallapiccola in their book, 'A Place Apart- Paintings of Kutch' which shall be discussed in great length in the chapter containing literature review.

Many discussions have been held by scholars on Gujarati paintings- specifically from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century on secular thematic subjects, and Vaishnava and Shakta miniatures paintings. Great scholars such as Coomaraswamy, N C Mehta, W Norman Brown, O C Gangoly, Majmudar, Sarabhai Nawab, Umakant P Shah, and Ratan Parimoo, are a few who contributed extensively to this stylistic development of medieval Gujarati painting. And these style that prevailed in Gujarat during the medieval period continues to evolve in smaller pockets in Ahmedabad and Surat. Nevertheless, the works that develop in Kutch around 1740's does not show a continuation with the style that evolves in other parts of Gujarat, hence the current study is a monograph prepared precisely to understand the miniature painting tradition of Kutch region.

The preliminary interest of the present research is three-fold. 1) To bring to light the lesser-known paintings specific to Kutch regions. 2) to define its stylistic affiliation, and 3) to attempt to remove the ambiguity in the area of study. Alongside critical cataloguing, the research also emphasizes on raising some of the relevant issues pertaining to the study- such as: Weather Kutch paintings were a minor off-shoot of a prominent schools or a provincial school? Who were its patrons and artist? What inspired this tradition and how did it sustain for a hundred and fifty years? What led to the decline of this tradition? Why and how these lesser-known collections moved out of Kutch? Are the reasons similar to the other popular schools across India? or does Kutch have a different story to narrate? Today what is the significance of these paintings in the pan-Indian context?

The research broadly speculates that this provenance was a promising centre for painting activity in Gujarat during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. This assumption could be wrong, but resisting that idea would not have led to a valid conclusion. Hence to narrow down to a convincing answer, an extensive survey was carried out in the six broad areas of issues, which also forms the core chapters of this research. 1) A Geo-political Survey of Kutch, 2) Literature Review, 3) Cataloging of Relevant and Unpublished Material 4) Tracing the Artist, 5) An Enquiry into its Patronage, and 6) Reviewing the Centre-peripheral Relation of Kutch.

## Chapter 1: Geo-political Survey of Kutch

This chapter touch upon briefly the topography of this land, and the factors that influenced the Geo-political condition of this region. Starting from the earliest settlers to foreign invaders, the rise of Jadejas clans in Kutch, to the annexations of the northwest frontiers, it is observed that the land remained vulnerable to change cause of the position that it takes in the Indian subcontinent. Be it the early dynasties like the Western Kshatrapas, Maitrakas, Chalukyas, and Vaghelas; or the later Islamic empire like the Sultanate and Mughals, all established their supremacy over the land (as it allowed the power to engage in business with other continents using its established mercantile enterprise), but none except for the Samma Rajputs made it their home. Similarly, even the British saw an advantage in establishing friendly ties with its rulers. This political scenario has affected greatly the migration of its people which profoundly altered the racial distribution of this land. Hence the

brief introduction to this land and its people in relation to its contemporaries may suffice in forming a base for later chapters.

## Chapter 2- Literature Review

This long-forgotten tradition of painting was brought to light amongst the concerned readers for the first time in the year 1983 through the book, 'A Place Apart- Paintings of Kutch' which was authored by Dr. B N Goswamy and Dr. A Dallapiccola. The book addresses the 'whys' and 'wherefores' of this traditional impulse through 60 visuals that reached Germany with Mr. H M Fuest. As this is the only publication keeping in focus similar concerns as the present research, a comprehensive summary of this publication is carried out, followed by listing down the areas of issues and gaps in the research as suggested by the two authors. The views held by other scholars on the publication, gave further impetus that more material is available for further research on the study. Notes by Mildred Archer and Adrian C. Mayer are considered crucial. Followed by a few critical observations marked in the process of current documentation. Alongside these notes, even articles, monograms, and notes published by other scholars are outlined in this chapter.

## Chapter-3: Paintings of Kutch- Cataloguing of Relevant and Unpublished material

The third chapter deals with one of the primary concerns of the research, which is to bring together visual materials unpublished so far. An attempt has been made in every possible way to incorporate a wide range of scattered materials, group them into thematic sets, and weave a common thread within these materials. The selection of visuals was not restricted to the stylistic affiliation which we call the '*kalam*', but rather the focus was to bring together paintings made in Kutch by the local artist. For the ease of handling a wide range of materials they have been broadly classified into four broad thematic ranges such as: A) Portrait and Durbar paintings of the Maharaos of Kutch, B) Vaishnava paintings C) Ethnographic studies, of the Company period, and D) Festivals scrolls. The concluding note to this chapter discusses at length the revised stylistic development of Paintings in Kutch during the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

#### Chapter 4- Tracing the Artist: The Contributors of this Tradition

Having dealt with a wide range of materials in the third chapter, an attempt has been made in this session to trace the artists who were contributing to the painting traditions. Be it the miniatures or the frescoes, a large number of them are referred to as 'Kamangari' by the people of Kutch. This terminology comes from 'Kamangar', a bow-making Muslim community that extensively participated in the art activities of Kutch. But the questions that are being raised are: Is this terminology genuine, or a more loosely stated idea? Did the Kamangars contribute to the works on paper or did they work on the frescos? How did these families learn the art of painting? What was their style of painting? A profusely large number of works done on walls and manuscripts needed familiarity with Hindu Iconography. How did the Kamangars familiarize themselves with Hindu iconography? As a response to these questions, it was important to explore deeper into these problematic areas.

#### Chapter 5- An Enquiry into Art Patronage: A Critical Survey

This chapter deals with the next major dimension of the study, which is a survey of the patronage of art and learning in this area. An investigation into what led to the influence and inspiration in society from the mid-eighteenth century to the early twentieth centuries. As we all know that art is unfortunately not a basic necessity or rather a luxury, it can flourish only in times when the land is on its path to wisdom and necessarily can be brought up by wealthy art lovers. Based on the social responses to art in the present documentation and with the changing styles, the art patronage of Kutch is being re-examined by grouping them into the three major potential classes in the society namely the Royal, Merchants & British.

#### Chapter 6- Reviewing the Centre-Peripheral Relation of Kutch

The centre-peripheral relations of Kutch from the eighteenth to the twentieth century further help narrow down to conclusions by explaining this 'Peripheries' structural relationship with its 'Centre', which puts an impact on art. Here Kutch is being re-defined as a periphery in relation to its advanced centre by which it is getting influenced. The centre is always advanced in its capital, has an established connectivity, improved technology, and has a high population- which conduce to its prosperity and cultural development of a provenance. On the contrary, at the periphery, there is a delay, and rigidity in new developments. Activities such as the art of painting would struggle to survive. Kutch painting tradition is such an impulse that was inspired

by seeing the centre, which sustained for a while, and declined due to social factors. Hence this chapter majorly focuses on the factors that inspired the painting development in the eighteenth century, its sustenance, and the factors that affected the decline.