

Indian Art based on Hindu shilpa texts Silparatham

(Academic Script)

INTRODUCTION

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Shilpa Ratna is a 16th century classical treatise on traditional south Indian performing arts. The basic norms and principles in the south Indian paintings and mural art are laid down in Shilpa Ratna. Composed and written by Shri Kumara. Shilpa means sculpture and ratna means gem. Shilparatna is a broad term that includes those artistic practices that either uses the body as a medium of expressions, such as dance and drama or that which represents the body as an expression such as sculpture and murals.

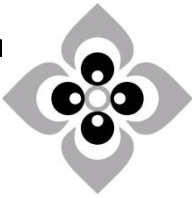
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The Shilpa Ratna acknowledges the tenets of painting like the proper set of colors and the right combinations which leads to stylized balance and rhythm. According to Shilpa Ratna, a Chitra (sculpture in round and relief and painting) is divided into three styles:

- 1.Chitra
- 2.Ardhchitra
- 3.Chitrabhasha

Ardhachitra is a sketch work of a painting, and Chitra bhasha is communication through painting.

The Shilpa Ratna suggests the use of pure color that is yellow, white, red, black, and blue. Shilpa Ratna also guides on what type



of brushes should be used. We get to know about the postures, modes of light and shade, mixing of colors, application of gold and its burnishing. Shilpa Ratna has mentioned the process of making fine gold powder from thin gold leaves for painting applications. The powder produced would have a flaky shape, which gives higher covering area per unit mass.

Shilparatna describes various types of colors that were chiefly used in Paintings.

Sita- white

Pita- yellow

Rakta- red

Kajjala- black

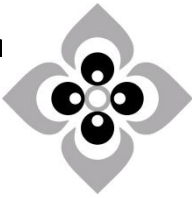
Syama- dark shade

The fresco seccos of Kerala are popular for its technical characteristics where walls were painted only when they become dry.

Shilpa ratna is believed to be a principle text on the painting techniques of Kerala murals, where it mentions the use of pure colors sometimes used alone and many times mixed to get a particular hue. White, yellow, red, black and terreverte or Syama are known as the pure colors.

Ochre-red, Ochre-yellow, white, bluish green and pure green are the main colors that are used in Kerala murals, while limited use of golden yellow, brown, yellowish green, greenish blue and sky blue is also can be noticed. Lemon Juice or solution of Thurisu (Copper Sulphate) was used to apply on the surface to mellow the alkalinity of lime before starting the painting on that surface.

The colors for the murals were prepared from minerals and vegetables, white was made from lime, black from carbon soot of oil lamps, red and yellow were prepared from minerals, blue was



produced plants like Neela Amari or Indigo Ferra. Green was created from a local mineral called Eravikkara, deep red was obtained from lac. Ancient scriptures also recommend use of yellow arsenic (Realgar) and Vermilion (red lead) for getting yellow and red colours.

Colors were mixed in wooden bowls, coconut water and exudes from neem tree was used as binding medium. Pine resin and oil provides luster, hence the paintings were over coated with this mixture.

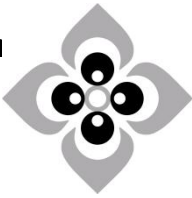
The type of brushes is also mentioned in the Shilpa Ratna, as it categories three types of brushes i.e. flat, medium and fine. Flat brushes are made from the hairs found on the ears of calves, medium from the bottom of goat's belly and fine brushes were made by the thin hairs from the tails of muskrats or narrow grass blades. Shilpa Ratna advocates the use of nine brushes in the above three types for applying each colour.

Once the subject or theme is selected, the outline is sketched with dung crayons and then painted with appropriate colors.

Shilpa Ratna suggests three types of coloring the human characters as per their qualities and status. The Hindu scriptures classify human race as Satwa (the noble) Rajas (active after power) and Tamas (low and mean characters). The Satwik is depicted by shades of green, Rajasik by red or gold and Tamasik in white and the demons and demonesses by black.

Shilpa Ratna also recommends various postures of human figure drawing such as frontal, half-frontal, Askance, one-and-quarter eyed and profile.

It is researched and stated that the style of Kerala murals took inspiration from the Dravidian devotional art of Kalamezhuthu, kalam is a unique drawing also called dhulee chithram or powder



drawing. The artist uses the floor as his canvas. Kalamezhuthu pattu is performed as part of the rituals to worship and propitiate gods like Kaali, Ayyappan or Vettakkorumakan.

Mural tradition of Kerala influenced by the Pallava art can be traced back to seventh and eighth century AD. The oldest in them is believed to be in the rock-cut cave temple of Thirunandikkara that is now in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu.

Kerala art

The art of painting on walls in Kerala dates back to prehistoric era. Paintings found in the Anjanad Valley of Idukki District are believed to be the oldest. Archaeologists believe that these belong to different periods from early Paleolithic era to recent past that the history can reach. Rock engravings belonging to Mesolithic era also were unearthed in Edakkal in Wynad and Perumkadavila in Thiruvananthapuram District.

The best examples of Kerala mural could be found at Padmanabhapuram Palace, Thiruvananthapuram. The walls of its central hall are beautifully decorated with mural paintings in abundance. The themes of paintings are various episodes and moments drawn from Hindu epics. The Krishnapuram Palace is situated in a village in Kayamkulam dynasty; this palace holds the largest mural panels of Kerala, which depicts the scenes of Gajendra Moksham of Bhagavatham.

Other sites that offer a glimpse of beautiful murals are Panayannarkkavu (Parumala), Ettumanoor Murals at the Siva Temple in Ettumanoor (Kottayam), Pundareekapuram Murals at Pundareekapuram temple at Thalayolapparambu (Kottayam), Mattancherry Murals at the Bhagavathy temple in Kochi, Kottakkal Murals at Venkatta Tevar Siva Temple in Kottakkal (Kozhikkode) are the famous examples of mural paintings. Most of these depict lives or instances from sacred books and epics.



Intricate carvings, murals and exquisite wall paintings reflect the prolific talent of the sculptors and painters who enjoyed the patronage of Travancore kings.

A traditional Kerala mural strictly follows the Pancha-varna (five colors) scheme, using only red, yellow, green, and black and white. In fact, it is this adherence to a limited earthy palette that gives the murals much of their distinctive look and feel. White, yellow, black and red are the pure colors, according to Shilparatna. The ocher yellow, ocher red, white, bluish green and pure green are the more important colors.

Shilpa Ratna discusses the preparation of white-clay or kaolin and lime i.e. Sudha, prepared from burnt conch, oyster or other shells, as the main source of white pigments. The red lead is called Sindura, soft red is Mrdurakta, Red ochre or middle red is known as Madhyarakta, Laksarasa is juice of Lac and deep red is called Atirakta.

The metallic application in paintings is described in detail in Shilpa Ratna. It says that the metal should be thinned into a kind of leaves also called patravinyasa in Sanskrit, another way of metal application is to melt the metal into a liquid by putting it into a narrow vessel then giving a chemical treatment, that is known as Rasakriya.

Shilpa Ratna has mentioned the process of making fine gold powder from thin gold leaves for painting applications. The powder produced would have a flaky shape, which gives higher covering area per unit mass.

Shilparatna, makes a mention of the types of clay that were used in the ancient period in the lost wax process of icon making. It states the various grades of clay required fall into the following five categories:



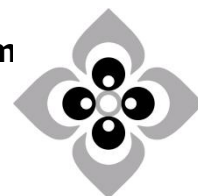
- a. Very hard clay: Clay plus powdered pottery tiles and nut water.
- b. Medium clay: The above mixture should first be dried, then pounded on a pounding stone to fine powder and mixed with dung.
- c. Soft clay: Three parts of clay plus one part of powdered pottery, mixed together on a grinding stone.
- d. Fine clay: The above mixture is again pounded on the grinding stone with an admixture of dung.
- e. Crucible-making clay: Husks which have been burned to powder and cotton fabric pounded to powder, are mixed together in equal parts, and in turn, pounded on the grinding stone. The crucible is to be made of the above mixture and arranged by means of thin wire and thread.

The ancient Sanskrit texts of Shilpa Shastra and Yantra Sarvasva mentions the use of metal casting for the purpose of making sculptures and other products like lamps, doors and frames, bells, cooking utensils, agricultural implements and weapons.

A detailed description of metal casting has been included in mediaeval texts such as Shilparatna and Manasara. The major application was in creating the idols used for worship; and very strict rules were laid down to achieve perfection in terms of talmana (proportions), mudra (stance) and bhava (expression). Natural resin and bees wax is obtained from specific trees, it is mixed with a bit of mustard or ground nut or coconut oil to prepare a mixture then it is heated on a high temperature and pored into sheets. This mixture helps in the cutting of the models.

The Lost Wax Process

In some cases, when multiple (ten or more) orders for the same model are placed, then a plaster or cement mould is made for making a rough shape of the wax models before detailed carving

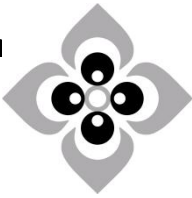


using spatula, knife and scraper, etc.

The carved wax model is carefully pasted over (except for one or two holes for wax removal and metal pouring) with initial layers of fine river clay (or alumina sand plus bentonite), followed by coarser clay. Small amounts of charcoal, gingillee oil, cow dung and natural (tree) resin may be added to the clay, especially for cores. The clay-covered models are kept for 2-4 weeks to dry in the sun until they are hard enough for handling. Then they are tied with metal wire (to prevent expansion and breakage during de-waxing), the models are heated using cow dung cakes for melting out the wax, which is collected for reuse.

The Chola bronzes are made up of an alloy of various metals, like copper (84%), zinc (14%) and tin (2%). Gold and silver was also added in the making of idols of deities and other gods and goddesses who are to be worshipped and for common and general statues iron and lead may be added. The metal charge is calculated in terms of the weight of the wax model (usually 8-9 times) and melted in a crucible furnace using wood charcoal and coal as fuel. Hand-operated bellows are used for blowing air into the furnace. The mould is preheated to the metal temperature before pouring. After cooling, the mould is broken to expose the casting. The gates and risers are removed, followed by filing and polishing to acquire a glossy shine. Finer features are obtained by chiseling with iron nails.

The ancient lost wax process is still practiced in many districts all over India, such as in Bankura (West Bengal), Mayurbhanj, Puri and Cuttack in Orissa, Tirupathi (Andhra Pradesh), Thanjavur and Salem in Tamil Nadu, Mannar in Kerala, Mysore, Gulbarga and Belgaum in Karnataka, Kolhapur and Nashik in Maharashtra, Bastar in Chattisgarh, Aligarh and Moradabad Uttar Pradesh and Mandi Himachal Pradesh. Similar practice is also found in Nepal, Thailand and beyond. The swamimalai temple complex in Thanjavur contains a vast number of statues made with the lost



wax process.

The shilparatna describes the iconographical details various deities. According to the text the Yoga Narsimha has sixteen arms. He is holding in his hands a gada, chakra, shankha, bow, parashu, asi & khadga(sword), a hala (plough), a trishul, kunta, arrow, a snake, a lotus, musala (a pestle), tramsha, pasha and ankusha. The yoga Narsimha also known as chakra rupi, is a lion man and an avatar of Vishnu. He is often depicted on the back of the chakra sculpture. He is presented as radiant as the sun and with protruding tusks from the sides of his mouth.

Garuda has been described in shilparatna as having eight arms, in six of them he holds water vessel, mace, conch shell, discus, sword and snake, while the feet of Vishnu rests on his two front hands.

Shilparatna prescribes that mahishasurmardini should have ten hands. In her right hands, she holds a trishul, a khadga, shaktyayudha, a chakra and a dhanush. In her left hands she should be carrying a pasha, an ankush, a khatak, a parshu and a ghanta. A third eye is on her forehead, she should be wearing a jata makuta, adorned with Chandra kala or the digit of moon on her head.

Durga or mahishasurmardini is known for her bravery and courage, she has full high breasts and a slim waist, and she stands in a Tribhanga mudra or contrapposto pose. This is an ideal posture for the human figure statues in medieval India. A buffalo demon whose head is cut off, blood is gushing down its neck and he is lying at her feet, indicates the victory of good over evil.

From inside its neck should be visible a half emerging real asura, bound by a naga pasha of the devi. The right leg of the devi should be on back of her mount (lion) and her left leg touching the buffalo-body of demon.



Shilpa Ratna indicates that architecture was quite evolved in the ancient period. The figure of lions in Asoka Pillar is so beautiful that it has been adopted as Indian National Emblem. Many temples that are still in existence proclaim that the art of building had attained a high refinement.

The Shilpa-ratna talks about Dakshinamurthy, who is an aspect of the Hindu god Shiva and is known as a guru (teacher) of all types of knowledge. This aspect of Shiva is his personification as the supreme or the ultimate awareness, understanding and knowledge. This form represents Shiva as a teacher of yoga, music, and wisdom, and giving exposition on the Shastras. As per scriptures, if a person doesn't have a Guru, then they can consider and worship Lord Dakshinamurthy as their Guru.

Sri Dakshinamurthy must be adorned with five emblems or the pancha mudra: the gem on the forehead called mani in Sanskrit, the ear rings or kundala, the necklaces known as kanthika, the bracelets on arms and legs called ruchaka in sanskrit and , the girdle or mekhala. These ornaments are said to symbolize the spiritual power or virya, forbearance or shanty, generosity or daana, moral virtue or shila and wisdom.

Sri Dakshinamurthy

According to Shilpa Ratna the nature of Sri Dakshinamurthy is sattva, pure, blissful, bright and serene (shantha). His complexion is radiant like a clear crystal (shuddha spatikopama) or soothingly bright as the jasmine flower or the moon (kundendu dhavala prabha). He is also described as glowing like gold (hema prabha) or dark (shyamabha). Some Tantric texts describe his complexion as white as milk (kshira-gaura) or snow-white (Kailasadri – nibha) absorbed in in self (bhava shuddha). His countenance is free from even the traces of disturbance (klesha vargitam). A soothing and gentle smile lights up his expression.



His steady gaze is fixed upon the tip of his nose (nasagra drshti yuk) or on the tip his toes (padagre drhsti patam). His eyes must be slightly open (kimchid unmiltair netraih) as in contemplation (yoga dhyananusarinam). He is dressed in white upper garments (sittottariya) and a yajnopavita (sita-upavita). His lower garment is of tiger skin (vyagra charmambara) or silk (divyambara) .

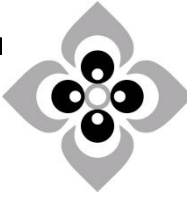
Shilparatna, captivatingly, describes a female form of Ganesha (Ganapati) called Shakti-Ganapati, who resides in the mountains of Vindhyas. The deity has an elephant head and two trunks. She looks like a young woman having a curvaceous body, a slim waist, pot bellied, round hips and full blossoming breasts, she is vermilion red in colour and with ten arms. This icon probably belongs to Shaktism, the Hindu Goddess-worshipping sect.

However, this form is also interpreted as a composite of Ganesha and his shakti, due to the presence of the twin trunks.

A Vinayaki sculpture is found in Chitrapur Math in Shirali. Here, Vinayaki is full-breasted, but slender, unlike pot-bellied Ganesha. Her two front hands are held in abhaya, fear not and vrada, boon giving mudras. She carries a sword and a noose. Her trunk is turned to the left. This image is said to be a Shakta Goddess.

The Vira or Virabhadra is a fearsome form of the Hindu god Shiva. In Shilpa Ratna vira is described with eight arms, in a walking posture, carries a Trident, Sword, Arrow and Antelope in right arms and the Skull-cup (Kapala), Shield (Khadga), Bow and Goad (Mazhu) in his left hands. This form is beautifully sculptured in Thiruvannamalai Temple and is worshipped as Aghora-Rudra-Murthi or Maha-Bhairava-Murthi.

In Shilpa-Ratna he is eight armed and rides a Vedala-Vahana (Vampire) and is surrounded by his Bhuta-Ghanas (Nija-Gana-Sahita). He is white complexioned and fierce looking. His tawny



red matted locks are tied into a Knot in the top of his head (Jata-Bhandha) and adorned with the crescent Moon. His hands carry Battle-Axe, Hand-Drum, Sword, Shield, Skull-cap, Spear and his front two hands are in Abhaya-Varadha gestures. He is clad in Tiger skin.

In his Digambara Form, his body is adorned with many Serpents (Bhujanga-Gana-Bhushana) and his third eye is equally awesome. His eyebrows are knit in anger and his hair is like flames (Jvala-kesa). His body is smeared with the blood of the enemies slain by him and he also carried a Gada (Club) and Trishula (Trident).

In Sapta-Matruka Panels we find Veera-Bhadra is in the right end and Ganapathi is in the left end flanking the Seven Mother Goddesses in between.

As per Roopamandanam :-

“Veereswaracha Bhagavan Vrisharoodo Dhanur dhara :

Veena hastha : Trisulamcha Mathrunaam akradho bavedh //”

Veerabhadra when placed along with the Sapta-Matrukas is seen holding the Bow, Arrow, Veena and Trisula, with a Varadha-Hasta in sitting posture with the Nandhi Vahana at his foot.

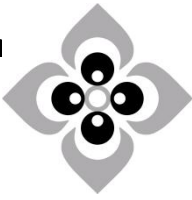
The iconographic works like Shilparatna, the Matsya Purana and Agamic texts like Amshumadbhedagama, Kamikagama, Supredagama and Karanagama describe the iconography of Ardhanarishvara.

"Champeya Gaurardha Shareerakayai Karpooa Gaurardha
Shareerakaya

Dhammillakayai Cha Jataadharaya Namah Shivayai Cha Namah
Shivaya"

- Ardhanari Nateshwara Stotra.

The meaning of this verse is as follows:



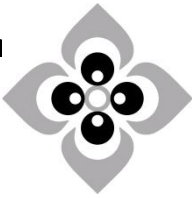
"Salutations to Shivaa, who has a jasmine-colored, fair half-form and who has long and beautiful curly locks
Salutations to Shiva, who has camphor colored half-form and who has matted tresses"

Ardhanarishvara is one of the 64 manifestations of Parashiva, the aspect of Lord Shiva, who is Absolute, beyond all human comprehension and is hence considered the Nirguna Brahman (the Supreme One, who is beyond attributes). Since Ardhanarishvara represents the perfect synthesis of male and female forms, it also embodies the Prakriti and the Purusha, the feminine and masculine energies of the cosmos and also illustrates how Shakti, the Sacred Feminine, is inseparable from Shiva, the male principle of God. This form also symbolizes the all-pervasive, all-enduring nature of Lord Shiva.

The right superior side of the body usually is the male Shiva and the left is the female Parvati; in rare depictions belonging to the Shaktism school, the feminine holds the dominant right side.

The male half wears a jata-mukuta (a headdress formed of piled, matted hair) on his head, adorned with a crescent moon. Sometimes the jata-mukuta is adorned with serpents and the river goddess Ganga flowing through the hair. The right ear wears a nakra-kundala, sarpakundala ("serpent-earring") or ordinary kundala ("earring").

The female half of the deity is shown having a karanda-mukuta or basket-shaped crown. The well-combed hair is neatly held in place. The left ear wears a valika-kundala. A bindu or tilaka adorns her forehead. While the male half of the neck is shown ornamented with a hooded serpent, the female neck has a blue lotus.



The male half of the body has a flat masculine chest, broader shoulder, wider waist and muscular thigh. He also wears a yagnopavita or sacred thread across the chest. This sacred thread may sometimes divide the torso into its male and female halves.

Sometimes, the male eye is depicted smaller than the female one and a half-moustache is also seen. A half third eye (trinetra) is prescribed on the male side of the forehead in the canons; a full eye may also be depicted in middle of forehead separated by both the sides or a half eye may be shown above or below Parvati's round dot. A common elliptical halo (prabhamandala/prabhavali) may be depicted behind the head; sometimes the shape of the halo may differ on either side.

The Shilparatna specifically talks about the oneness of Vishnu and Lakshmi. It also denotes the combination of Sat (truth) and Cit (consciousness), producing ananda (bliss) called Satcitananda. Like Ardhanarishvara, the left half is female signifying Lakshmi, the right is the male Vishnu. The icon is depicted standing on a lotus pedestal or may be seated on the Garuda (the vahana – mount – of Vishnu) as well as a tortoise or Kurma, often associated with Vishnu, but aligned with Lakshmi as her mount in this particular iconography.

Ardhnareeshwara

The Vishnu half holds the four traditional attributes of Vishnu: chakra (discus), shankha (conch), gada (mace) and lotus.

The female half holds a kalasha (coconut-mango leaves atop a pot) or kumbha (water-pot) filled with gems, mirror, manuscript or book and a lotus. The goddess side may also hold a bell or a rosary.

It is believed that the early iconography of Ardhnareeshwara could have been inspired by the Vedic literature's composite



figure of Yama-Yami, the combination of the primordial Creator Vishvarupa or Prajapati and Agni, the Fire God. This figure appears as a bull, who is also a cow. Interestingly, the androgynous forms of Hermaphroditus and Agdistis are famous in Greek mythology as well.

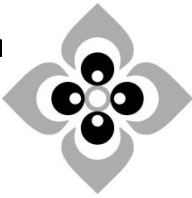
Shilpa Ratna describes takshaka and vardhaki as wood Shilpins; takshaka possesses the knowledge of wood types and practices the art of cutting wood, while vardhaki possesses the knowledge of wood forms and practices the art of carpentry. Carpentry was also an essential Shilpa Shastra during the construction of a Hindu temple.

A mythical genealogy of the artists is given in most of the architectural treatises. The four faces of Brahma, the creator, are believed to have created the four heavenly architects Visvakarman, Maya, Tvashtar, and Manu. Their four sons are called respectively Sthapati, Sutra-grahin, Vardhaki, and Takshaka. Each is an expert in his own skills. Sthapati is in rank the director-general and the consulting architect, Sutra-grahin is the guide (guru) of the other two, and Vardhaki is the instructor of Takshaka. The Sthapati should have a proficient knowledge of all Vedas.

Sutragrahin should also be proficient in the Vedas and Shastras . But the special branch of his study is measuring and he must be an expert in drawing and measurements or tala.

Vardhaki, too, should have the general knowledge of the Vedas. But the objective of his special study is painting. Apart from tala he should also be able to design architectural and sculptural objects from his own ideas.

Takshaka, is the carpenter or joiner, he needs to be skilled in carpentry. But he should also be proficient in clay work. He



should follow the instructions of his three superiors, but at the same time he must be proficient enough of doing all his works independently. And he should have aspiration to rise in rank. But he should be of good behaviour, clever, dexterous, learned in sciences, free from excessive desire for gain, and generous to forgive his rivals.

The shilparatna also instructs about ethics for stage performance, like the optimal space for a performance. The Natya Griha (classical Dance spaces and theatres), Natya means Postural dance and Griha mean house or home in Kerala. The natya griha is made according to the principles of the Natya Shastra and as one of the oldest performance arts it is still practiced according the same rudiments.

The mudras play an essential role in classical dances like Bharatnatyam, Kathakali. Shilparatna describes the elaborate codified language of mudras. Mudras are stylized gestures and symbolic signs made by the hands and body posture used in Bharatanatyam and Kathakali and known as angika abhinaya that literally means body-expressions.

I hope you liked the episode and found the information helpful in your understanding of the ancient text of Shilpa Ratna and its contribution in laying down the fundamentals of Indian Arts.