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**Art and Artists of a Sacred Town**

**Bijoy Kumar Dutta**

**Associate Professor**

**The IIS University, Jaipur, India**

Athens Institute for Education and Research  
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece  
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209  
Email: [info@atiner.gr](mailto:info@atiner.gr) URL: [www.atiner.gr](http://www.atiner.gr)  
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Athens Institute for Education and Research

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## **Art and Artists of a Sacred Town**

**Bijoy Kumar Dutta**  
**Associate Professor**  
**The IIS University, Jaipur, India**

### **Abstract**

Art is an attempt to achieve beauty, interpret life and to convey an idea, emotion, in a visually interesting form. One of the traditional roles of the artist is to make a visual record of the places, people, and events around them. Therefore, art is a vital and continuous aspect of human expression.

The purpose of this paper is to present a sacred artistic tradition that is being neglected by the art lovers, art critics, and art historians and not much has been done to establish this art as a true art form.

Through this process, my paper sheds new light on the art of a sacred Indian town of Western Rajasthan called Nathdwara. For over 200 years, Nathdwara has been the centre of a religious sect called *pushtimargi* or followers of Indian God Lord Krishna. There are very few religious traditions, which are as rich a fare of sensuous delight as the Nathdwara art style.

As noted art historian Ananda Coomarswami wrote, *Rajput art creates a magic world where all men are heroic, all women are beautiful and passionate and shy, beasts both wild and tame are the friends of man, and trees and flowers are conscious of the footsteps of the Bridegroom as he passes by.* This magic world is not unreal or fanciful, but a world of imagination and eternity, visible to all who do not refuse to see with the transfiguring eyes of love.

My paper provides a glimpse into the lives of the Nathdwara artists, their art, and artistic tradition. There is a wide range of techniques used in making these paintings. Although most paintings are done on cloth, using different artistic media like watercolour, gouache, tempera spanning a period of about two hundred years. The story of these paintings is closely linked with the city of Nathdwara whose principal deity is Srinathji or Lord Krishna. It has been a tradition of worshipping only painted icon that encouraged artists of this town to grow as a centre of art popularly known as Nathdwara style.

Most probably, the artists were initially employed here as masons and then they started painting murals at the temple building, and gradually they turned to painting on cloth, paper, and other surfaces since worship of a painted icon, were permitted, and even encouraged by the priests. Artists in Nathdwara commenced painting the God's icon quite early and the tradition continues until the present day.

The shrine, in which the image is housed, is decorated with cloth hangings mostly in cotton, painted with scenes in watercolor pigments or other techniques such as *kalamkari*, a technique of textile-dyeing which combines mordant painting with the use of wax resist.

The subject matter of these cloth paintings varies according to the particular ceremonies for which they are intended and they are made in sets of that every item in the decoration shrine appropriate for the occasion. The principal hanging in each set is the one, which drapes behind the image and acts as a kind of stage set. These are

painted with scenes showing worship within the shrine or events in Krishna's life as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Because of the continuous use to which the cloth hangings are subjected, there is a constant need for their replacement. As Nathdwara is the present headquarters of the *Vaishnava* cult, there is also a large demand for devotional paintings by pilgrims. As a result, the painting tradition of this backdrop or popularly called *pichhawai* is alive to this day. Here artists families (around 400) continue to pursue their aesthetic endeavors and contribute to the grand spectacle of devotional worship and festivals conducted in the palace shrine. They also provide aesthetic adornments for all devotees and subsidiary shrines across India and abroad. The artists work is vibrant and innovative, rich with assimilations, a testimony of continuum through time, yet one, which is always evolving.

**Contact Information of Corresponding author:**

*Those who are resolute on religion are secured by God.* On the land of Mewar, this has been the pious saying. Mewar is situated in the western part of India and acquires a large portion of Rajasthan. To the north of Mewar, about 30 miles away from Udaipur, Nathdwara is situated at the bank of river Banas. It is a big centre of pilgrimage for *Vishnav* devotees and is a pilgrimage of art. Nathdwara is the key center for the followers of *Vallabha Sect*.<sup>1</sup>

People of Rajasthan take immense pride in their culture and grand history. The art and crafts of the region reflects this regard towards their heritage. The paintings are vivid impressions of the historic events the region has seen and the expression of the artisan's veneration of the religion, rituals, and customs of the land. *Pichhavai* painting is a form of traditional fabric painting that is rooted in Rajasthan, India. *Pichhavai* are more refined and detailed than *phads* (traditional cloth paintings of Rajasthan, India). They are created and used as backdrops in the Shrinathji temple at Nathdwara and in other Krishna temples. The main theme of these paintings is Shrinathji and his exploits. *Pichhavai* are painted, printed with hand blocks, woven, embroidered, or decorated in appliqué. *Pichhavai* are done in dark rich hues on rough hand spun cloth. These paintings have deep religious roots and are executed with the utmost devotion of the painters. Presently *pichhavais* are painted in Udaipur and Nathdwara. The *pichhavai* of Nathdwara is an embroidered cloth hanging used as a decoration in temples and temple-chariots.

Nathdwara Artists are a group of artists working around the precincts of the famous Nathdwara temple in Rajasthan. They are renowned for splendid *Rajasthani* style paintings. *Pichhavai* Paintings, belongs to the Mewar School. The paintings revolve around the image of Srinathji, the enigmatic black-faced figure of Krishna, who is shown holding up Mount Govardhan. Over the centuries, these artists have produced a work of gorgeous illustrations. Several authoritative books have been published on this subject. Apart from *pichhavai* Paintings, the artists also produce small-scale paintings on paper. Themes from Krishna legend predominate.

### **The Vallabha Sect**

The Origin of sect is known to be in the midst of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Vallabhacharya, the founder of this sect, spread this religion and devotion (*bhakti*) to Lord *Krishna* throughout northern India, especially in *Brajamandal* (the land where Lord Krishna was born and spent his youth). The father of Vallabhacharya, Laxman Bhatt was an intellectual person and was supposed to be the incarnation of *Akshar Bhramashesh*.<sup>2</sup> Vallabhcharya was greatly influenced by the religious rituals of his father, and at the early age of 13 years only, he accomplished the task of studying the *Veda*, *Vedanga*, *purana* and other religious books.<sup>3</sup> At the onset, Laxman Bhatt undertook teaching veda to Vallabhacharya at home only. However, looking to his intellectual capability, he was sent to Swami Madhwananda on the *Ashada Sudi pushyark Yoga* for further studies. In a short span of four months, he astonished everybody by his profound study of the four *Vedas* and six *Shastras*.<sup>4</sup> In his youth, he went on a tour to the whole country. In the court of Raja Krishandev Rai of southern India, he argued intensely on *shashtras* in an assembly comprised of learned *Pandits*

<sup>1</sup> Lyons, Tryna, *The Artists of Nathdwara*, Mapin Publication, New York, p 29.

<sup>2</sup> Harishchandra, Bharatendu Babu, presented by Girishchandra, Heerak Jayanti Grantha, Sahitya Mandal, Nathdwara, 1997, p 35.

<sup>3</sup> Jhari, Dr. Krishnadev, Ashtachap and Parmananda, Sharda Prakashan, New Delhi, 1976, p 25.

<sup>4</sup> Harishchandra, Bharatendu Babu, presented by Girishchandra, Heerak Jayanti Grantha, Sahitya Mandal, Nathdwara, 1997, p 37.

and overruled the *Mayavad* (Illusionism) of Shankar. He was honored by the king and was offered the seat (*Gaddi*) of Vishnuswami and later he succeeded Acharya Vishnuswami who was the founder of *Vishnuswami sampradaya* (13<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>1</sup> Vallabhacharya created lot of faith and confidence among the Hindus in *vaishnav* literature and *vaishnav* religion. Apart from *Brajmandal* this *sampradaya* (sect) also flourished in Gujarat and Rajputana (two states of Western India).

### The Concept

The philosophical ideas of Vallabhacharya are known as *Shuddhadwetavad* (pure-dualism, i.e. monism), and the path that was shown by him is called *Pushti Marg* or the path of Grace. The main objective of *Pushti Marg* is to charm and glorify Lord Krishna. Here Shrinathji is worshiped as a symbol of Lord Krishna.<sup>2</sup> Vallabhacharya established *Pushti Sampradaya* (*sect*) in a different aspect from the *Maryada Marg* of his former *acharyas*. The article in the *pushti margiya granth, Sampradaya Pradeep* certifies this fact.

The following is an extract from the *granth (tome)*: In other sects (*Ramanuj, panchratra, narad* etc.) propagate a system of formulated worship. All though in the *Vishnuswami Sampradaya*, the devotion that was established was a self-requesting type, yet it is also the path of dignity. It is desired of Vallabhacharya that he may propound, execute, and enlighten the path of devotion and self-respect. Presently the devotees are being off tracked by the principles shown by Shankar. Therefore, the blessings of Vallabhacharya are essentially sought for. In the 4<sup>th</sup> *Shloka* (chant) of the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter, 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of *Bhagwat* (Hindu scripture that is part of the ancient Sanskrit Epic Mahabharata), special reference has been made of *Pushti* or the nourishment. In the self-conserved universe, the benevolence showered on the devotees by the Almighty, is nourishment of soul - *Pushti*. It is the concept of *Pushti Marg*, that when the devotees totally depend upon God, abandon all their wills on Him and surrenders his total self, then the Almighty showers His blessings and lighten up their souls with his *lilas* (childhood sport). Achievement of this *nitya-lila-swaroop* is the final goal of *Pushti Marg*. The abolition of all worldly pleasures and sorrows and the tendency to adore and love Lord Krishna, Vallabhacharya emphasized on *sewa* (Serving) and considered three main servings - *Karma* (Work), *Gyan* (Knowledge) and *Bhakti* (Devotion). He regarded and rendered great importance to *Bhakti*. According to him the *pundits* (priest) and *karm-kandi* (those who toil) persons only get heaven, scholars only achieve *akshar-bhrama* but an ardent devotee attains *purna puroshottam*, (the supreme power) and becomes immortal with the supreme and eternal power.

### Nathdwara

Shrinathji is said to have appeared at Mount *Govardhan* near Mathura. Vallabhacharyaji established the *paat* (the foundation) in 1520 century and started daily *seva* (worship). Since that day, the service or *seva* of *Prabhu* the Lord continued to be performed on Mount *Govardhan*. Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, on 9<sup>th</sup> October and twelfth year of his reign, ordered the demolishment of the *paat* (the temple). He ordered his chief, Abdul Nabi, to go to Mathura and destroy the *Butkhana* (the place of idol worship) of Katra that is supposed by the idol worshippers as their place of worship (Kaba).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jhari, Dr. Krishnadev, Ashtachap and Parmananda, Sharda Prakashan, New Delhi, 1976, p 27.

<sup>2</sup> Pratap, Dr. Rita, Bharatiya Chitrakala evam Murtikala Ka Itihas, Rajasthan Hindi Granth Academy, Jaipur, 2007, p 190.

<sup>3</sup> Panchajanya, 1 April, 1984.



In compliance to this order, many temples in the whole of India were demolished. Situated on Mount *Govardhan*, the main temple of the Vallabha Sect, the temple of Shrinathji (Lord Krishna) also faced the dread of demolition. Goswami Damodarji and his uncle Govindji, Balkrishnaji (priests of Srinathji) and Ganga Bai (the caretaker) left for Mathura, taking along the idol of Shrinathji, on October 10<sup>th</sup> 1669.<sup>1</sup> Many emperors and kings refused to give protection to Shrinathji due to fear of Aurangzeb and Moghals. At last, Rana Raj Singh of Mewar fortunately accepted Shrinathji in a very magnificent way. On 10 February 1672, the *paat* (foundation) of Shrinathji was established in Singad village, presently known as Nathdwara.<sup>2</sup>

With Shrinathji, some devotee artists of the nearby places of the mount *Govardhan*, came to Nathdwara and started to paint the divine form of Shrinathji.<sup>3</sup> The art style of Nathdwara, reached the other of areas of Mewar also. Udaipur became the most significant center of this art.<sup>4</sup> The city of Nathdwara has been known as an art city, along with its recognition as a religious destination, since last two hundred and eighty years. The devotees, who indulged in the decoration of Shrinathji, began painting the image of the Lord in the traditional style. The divine picture of Shrinathji had a great influence on the devotees and so the demand of these paintings increased considerably. The demand of paintings attracted a large number of renowned artists from Jaipur, Udaipur, Marwar and Pali areas to settle down in Nathdwara and with their artistic abilities began painting the form of Shrinathji. Thus, a new style of painting came into being which continued to flourish as 'Nathdwara style of paintings.' The famous art historian, A. Coomarswami, in the year 1926, stated Nathdwara style of paintings as a key style of painting of Mewar. In those times, the paintings prepared by the Nathdwara artists were distributed to the travelers and the followers of *Vaishnav Sampradaya* and the followers of Vallabhacharya in the whole Rajasthan and Gujarat.<sup>5</sup>

### The Celebrations

The most eminent exponent of *Vallabha Sect*, *Shri Harirai* has written about *Pushti Marg: the attainment of the form of Lord Krishna itself is both the contemplation and the achievement of the Almighty, and this is known as Pushti Marg.*

In the 4<sup>th</sup> *shloka* of the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of *Shrimad Bhagwat*, the *Pushthi* and *Poshan* has been analyzed. The creatures on earth get nourishment and flourish (*poshan*) by the grace of the Almighty. On the basis of this *shloka* only, Vallabhacharyaji has termed the sect propounded by him, as the *Pushthi Marg*. This sect does not permit meditation for the attainment of personal desires and yearnings. It does not propound *puja* (worship) and *karma kand* (deeds). The sect considers devotion of God through *seva* (Service) *only*.<sup>6</sup>

In the *Pushti Marg*, the *seva* of Lord Krishna is divided in two parts:

1. Activity Service or *kriyatmak seva*
2. Emotional Service or *bhavnatmak seva*

Activity service can be undertaken in two types –

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<sup>1</sup> Gurjar, Fatehlal 'anokha', Heerak Jayanti Grantha, Sahitya Mandal, Nathdwara, 1997, p 218.  
<sup>2</sup> Pratap, Dr. Rita, Bharatiya Chittrakala evam Murtikala Ka Itihas, Rajasthan Hindi Granth Academy, Jaipur, 2007, p 189.  
<sup>3</sup> Tod, Col. James, Cultural History of Rajasthan, First Part, Delhi 1829, p 145.  
<sup>4</sup> Ananda Coomarswami, A. K., Catalogue of Indian Collections, Part V, p 4.  
<sup>5</sup> Varma, Dr. Avinash, Bharatiya Chittrakala ka Itihas, Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly, 1992, p 189.  
<sup>6</sup> Shreeji Darshan, Nathdwara Mandir Mandal, Nathdwara, p 15.

- a. *Vittija* to serve in a financial way. This includes the construction of the temple, providing financial assistance to ensemble the material for decorating the temple and other donations.
- b. *Tanuja* to serve with body, i.e. doing service with hands. This includes cleaning the temple, stitching the dress of the idol of *thakurji* (the Lord), bathing the idol, decorating the idol of the Lord, (*shrinagar*), decorating the floor (*rangoli*), *Pichhavai* paintings, wall paintings, and wall hangings etc.

Emotional service is spiritual service. This intellectual service is undertaken through the heart (*Mana*), speech (*Vachana*) and deeds (*Karma*). The devotee surrenders himself or herself completely to the Lord Krishna. He finds himself totally engrossed in the '*lilas*' of Krishna.

This is the *Pushti - Pushta mansi seva*. This type of service is performed in two ways:

1. Daily Service: From early morning until the time of siesta, the devotee remains in the service of the Lord. This comprises of eight parts – *Mangla, Shrinagar, Gwal, Rajbhog, Utthapan, Sandhya, Bhog aarti* and *Shayana*.
2. Yearly Celebrations: In Yearly seva the festivities of six seasons are undertaken. Some important festivals are celebrated at an enormous dimension. These are *Janmashtami, Annakoot, Goverdhan pooja, Dol, Nandotsav, Maharaas, Akshya Tritiya* etc.

#### **Service of the Lord (*Thakurji*)**

The *Pushti Margiya* (follower of *pushti marg*) service comprises of three main parts. These are the *Raga, Bhog* and *Shringaar Seva*. According to Acharya Shri Vallabhacharya, every human being is captivated by the worldly pleasures. In order to get rid of these worldly evils, he suggests the service of God through these three *seva* methods and is engulfed in the total devotion of Lord Krishna.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Raga Seva*, songs, which practice, are persisting to serve Krishna. With the advent of Lord Govardhannath on this earth, his eight associates also came into being. All the eight together sang in praise of Lord Krishna describing the different Lila's performed by Him from time to time. These eight friends were Kumbhandas, Surdas, Krishnadas, Parmanandas, Govindas, Chit Swami, Chaturbhujdas and Nandadas.<sup>2</sup>

*Bhog sewa* is an incessant process, which begins with the waking up (*Mangala aarti*) and continues until the naptime (*Shayan*) of the Lord Krishna.

Ornamentation or *Shringaar* is also a major part of the Lord's routine. The Lord and the ambiance of his abode are decorated differently at different times of the day.

Decorating the temple with paintings of the Krishna again comprises of an equally important aspect. These are the *Pichhavai*, which adorn the abode of *Krishna*.

In the yearly celebrations, *Pichhavai* occupies a vital place. The decorations match the sentiments and the songs are also sung in accordance. All these expressions are depicted in the *Pichhavai* paintings.

*Pichhavai* paintings therefore aid in the overall décor of the Lord.

#### **The Art**

The main aim of the service method (*seva*) in the Vallabh Sampraday, is to show the different activities of Lord *Krishna (lilas)* and to re-enact these activities as though they were real. Through these activities, a devotee enjoys with his God.

<sup>1</sup> Jhari, Dr. Krishnadev, Ashtachap and Parmananda, Sharda Prakashan, New Delhi, 1976, p 28.

<sup>2</sup> Shri Harirai, Shrinathji ki Prakatya Varta, Vidya Vibhag, Mandhir Mandal, Nathdwara, Samvat 2008, p 19.

According to *Pushti Marg*, the devotees who surrender themselves totally in the service of the Lord are being protected by God Himself. The painters always try to show this emotion in his paintings and creation of *Pichhavai* art. Every part of *Pichhavai* Art is full of expression (*bhav*).

All the three aspects of *Pushthi Marg* are dominantly expressive. The singer keeps some particular expression in mind when he performs in the service of Lord Krishna. Emotions can be felt when Krishna is served meals and whatever is offered to the Lord is taken by all devotees as *bhog*. An artist too, in his creations, tries to depict some heartfelt felt expression of God. It is the combined effort of all these which enable the devotees to sense the proximity to the Lord.

The devotees involve themselves as *sakhi* (female friend) of Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna is the manifestation of 64 arts. He is the greatest musician, the creator of the world. The devotees of Lord Krishna make ardent efforts to attract the Lord with all those activities which are performed by the Lord Himself. These include all parts of *seva* (service).

### **The Technique of Preparing *Pichhavai***

Different paintings are made for different occasions, different seasons, festivals, and so on. While the painting has pink lotuses in the summer, the painting for *Sharad Purnima* is a night scene with the bright full moon. Themes such as *Raas Leela*, *Holi*, *Annakut*, *Govardhan Puja* (Hindu Festivals) are also seen in their relevant occasions. Sometimes rich embroidery or appliqué work is used on the paintings. Enclosed in a dark border, rich colours like red, green, yellow, white and black are used, with a lot of gold decorating the figures.

On a starched cloth, the painter first makes a rough sketch and then fills in the colours. Traditionally natural colours and brushes made of horse, goat or squirrel hair were used, but now faster and less expensive material have replaced them. One can still find many paintings done with natural colours only. The use of pure gold in the paintings adds to their value and charm. For one painting, it may take 3-4 days to just prepare colour from pure gold. A *Pichhavai* painting for the temple backdrop can take from a couple of weeks to a few months to prepare.

*Pichhavai* making is accomplished in many stages. *Pichhavai* is made on cloth. So fabric is the essential component, together with colors and brushes. Making of *Pichhavai* is completed in the following steps.

**Stitching Work** - 100% cotton fabric is the best for making *Pichhavai* paintings. Fabric is stitched on both sides so that a wooden or iron pipe can be placed in it. This work is known as *kholi* stitching. If an enormous *Pichhavai* painting is to be made, there is need to join two separate fabrics. The sides of the cloth are placed in such a manner that about half an inch of each part remains over the side of the other part. Now fine stitching is done in the center. After stitching, both parts are pasted with *lai*, (a kind of traditional adhesive made from wheat powder cooked in water till it arrives a consistency, a little thicker than the present day adhesives) and thus the *Pichhavai* cloth is prepared.

**Kadap (starch) or coating the *Pichhavai*** - For the starch, *neela thotha* or copper sulphate is mixed with *maida* or fine wheat powder and a fine paste is prepared. Some artists prepare *lai* with wheat powder called *atta* which is strong and durable. Both top and bottom of the fabric are fixed with bamboo and hanged. *Lai* is applied on the fabric with the help of a small rag cloth. Weight is placed on the lower side on the iron rod to avoid creasing on the cloth. In another process the cloth is held tightly on all the four sides and then *lai* is applied with a small rag cloth. Once the coating is applied it is allowed to dry properly.

**Starting the outline work** - Center of fabric is marked. Now one inch border is left on all four sides for ornamentation. To do this cotton thread is dipped in *geru* or saffron color and stretched over the cloth and light marks drawn on to the fabric. This process is also known as *soot-jhadna* or marking with thread. This work is done on the upper side of the cloth where starch is put. Now outline work is started. The twig of (*imli*) tamarind is burned to derive coal stick. All outline work is done with this coal stick. After the outline work the cloth is jerked off in order to clear all unnecessary carbon from the fabric. Then the outline of the final drawing is done with *geru* colour. This is also known as *kacchi likhai* or rough drawing.

**Preparing the color** – As the first step of preparing color, solid and natural colors are grinded on stones. Some colors are grinded dry and some wet. Before using them, these colors are sieved with a fine fabric. In *pichhavai* painting gold and silver colors are used extensively. These colors are prepared by the artists themselves. This technique of preparing silver and gold colors is known as *hal* of gold and silver. Gum of *dhawda* is mixed to prepare colors.

**Filling up the color** - Color is filled in the outline on fabric. For these brush is made in which hair on the neck of goat, squirrel, or horse is used. When all areas are filled with colors, then *ghutai* (grinding work) of *Pichhavai* is undertaken. In *ghutai* or grinding work, an oval shaped wood is used on which *hakeek* stone is fixed. For grinding, the *Pichhavai* is spread evenly on the floor. Wooden *ghota* (stick for grinding) is then placed on the back side of *Pichhavai* and grinding is done. Through this process, the surface of painting brightens up. When this process is complete, the lining work is taken up on *Pichhavai*. Face, nose, lips etc. are drawn with dark lines. This is called *pakki likhai* (final drawing). In *Pichhavai* painting, this line drawing work is of utmost importance. The specialized skill of the artist in line drawing can be visualized. After the outline drawing, the artist embarks on the work of *pardaj*. In this, shades to forms are given. The painting gives an effect of light and shade. Then, with a very fine brush, the work of making face, nose, and mouth is done which is known as *likhai* (drawing) or *ekharika*. In the end *wark chapna* or pasting of gold and silver leaf is done. At last, to make the gold and silver work brighter, *opni* (special instrument) is used for *opai* (to make colors bright) work. In this way, the process of *Pichhavai* making is completed. It takes 15 -20 days or even a little more to make one *Pichhavai*.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Artists

A *Pichhavai* painting for the temple backdrop can take from a couple of weeks to a few months to prepare. Wealthy family commission paintings for the temple, but for the common person, there are smaller versions to take home into their personal shrines also.

Since photography inside the temple is not allowed, the *Pichhavai* painters also make paintings representing the idol of Shrinathji in the same style; earning them, business and satisfying the devotees who want to take an image of their lord with them, both at the same time. Even after 400 years, the rituals and traditions and the devotion towards Shrinathji remain the same.

History of the painters is still not clear. More probably, they were employed as masons later they started painting murals in the new *haveli* (temple). The painters belong to two main Brahmin sub castes, the *Jangid* and the *Adi Gaud* and they live in two different places of the town. It is claimed by the artists that their ancestors settled in Nathdwara over 200 years ago.

<sup>1</sup> Information obtained from artist Ghanshyam Gadoria and Parmanand, Chief Artist.

There are many nineteenth century painters, whose names appear on paintings and *Pichhavais*. In Pushti Marg, painting has been a regular activity directly influenced by the priests and preachers. Many *acharyas* of the sect were painters of merit.

Nathdwara painting style, though is a mixture of various schools of paintings emerged with a distinctive character where artists painted as devotees and to fulfill their own emotional needs for pleasing the God.<sup>1</sup>

### **Conservation of painting by the *Pithadeeshwars***

The *pithadheesh* or the chief priests of the main temple have played an important role, in the development of this unique art of *Vallabha Sampradaya*. The way in which different art styles developed in the small and big states of Rajasthan due to the protection given by their respective rulers, in the same way, in Nathdwara also, due to the conservation and strict supervision and control of the priests, this art style has acquired its own identity, not only in Rajasthan but also in the other states of India and in many foreign lands

Here, it was essential for the artists to draw each and every small or big object according to the set pattern which was already laid down.<sup>2</sup> To make any change in the making of the picture of Srinathji, permission from the chief priests or *tilkayats* was compulsory.<sup>3</sup> It has been a tradition to appoint a chief artist for the supervision of all kind of artistic activities in the temple. The frescoes of the temple-palace are renovated every year by some expert artists during *dushhera* and *deepawali* (Hindu festivals) under the supervision of the *tilkayat* himself.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the social and political situations of the country, the personal life of the chief priests and their interest in art has directly influenced the Nathdwara style of painting from time to time.

We do not know much about the *Pushtimargiya* art activities of its initial times. The art activities started in this sect during the period of Gopinathji (1517-1534), the eldest son of Vallabhacharya. He encouraged the *chitra seva* (service through paintings).<sup>5</sup> During his period *chitra seva* was started as a regular duty (*seva*).

Vitthalnath (1516-1586) became *tilkayat* or chief priest after the untimely demise of Gopinathji who was himself a good artist and art lover. One of his paintings depicting the infantile Lord Krishna is still preserved in the Kandivali temple at Mumbai.<sup>6</sup> After Vitthalnath's demise, the period in which Purushottam (1532-1550), Girdhar (1541-1621), Damodar (1576-1638), Vitthaleshrai (1601-1656) Lal Girdhar (1633-1667) and Damodar (Bade Daoji) (1655-1704) held the charge of the head *tilkayat*, there was no such development in the field of art. Damodar (Bade Daoji) brought Shrinath to Mewar from Brijia and re-established the idol permanently in Sinhaad village near Udaipur.

The artists have been painting the frescoes, which are symbolic to the main *darshan* (view) of the lord, on the walls of the Haveli of Shrinathji, in accordance to the main philosophy of the *sampradaya*, from the initial time of the construction of

<sup>1</sup> Ambalal, Amit, Krishna as Shrinathji, Mapin Publication, New York, 1987, p 75.

<sup>2</sup> Mehta, Dr. Subhas, Vallabh Sampradai Chitrakala ke Vikas Me Tilkayat wa Acharyaon ki Bhomika, Heerak Jayanti Grantha, Sahitya Mandal, Nathdwara, 1997, p 458.

<sup>3</sup> Ambalal, Amit, Krishna as Shrinathji, Mapin Publication, New York, 1987, p 63.

<sup>4</sup> List of the chief artists [mukhiya chitrakar], of Nathdwara- 1. Chatura 2. Chiman 3. Chotu 4. Jagannath 5. Nathu 6. Sukhdev 7. Ghasiram 8. Devkishan 9. Bhagwandas 10. Heeralal 11. Jamnadas, 12. Tulsidas, 13. Parmananda.

<sup>5</sup> Ambalal, Amit, Srinathji Swarop Chitran ka Vikas Kram, Heerak Jayanti Grantha, Sahitya Mandal, Nathdwara, 1997, p 465.

<sup>6</sup> Vashisth, Dr. R. K., Mewar ki Chitrangan Parampara, Unique Traders, Jaipur, 1984, p 8-15.

the temple. It is believed that some artists of the Adi Gaur cast came to Nathdwara along with Shrinathji and started the painting work here. Gradually the artists from the Jangids and Mewaras society also came in search of job and settled here only.<sup>1</sup> *tilakayat* Govardhanesh (1707-1763) was born in Nathdwara. A painted *Pichhavai* was displayed at the back of Shrinathji during his padagrahan (office taking) festival of Govardhanesh. In those pathways Lord Shri Krishna and Balrama were shown taking their cattle to the field for grazing. It was for the first time that a painted *Pichhavai* was displayed at the back of Shrinathji.<sup>2</sup> After this, it became a tradition of painting *Pichhavais* not only in Nathdwara but also in other temples of the sect. New dimensions were added to the Painting style of the Sampradaya, by various artists, under the able guidance of *tilakayat* Govardhaneshji.<sup>3</sup> After Govardhanesh, Govind (1713-1776) and Bade Girdhar (1769-1807) became *tilakayats*. They maintained the tradition started by Govardhanesh ji and also supplemented other techniques and emotional feelings (*bhav rupas*) to it. In this tradition, the contributions of Damodar (1797-1826) who was popularly known as *Dauji*, are remarkable.

During his time, a new era began as far as the development and wealth of Nathdwara was concerned. Many *Pichhavais* were painted during *Dauji's* tenure and these were placed in the *seva* (service). Many of the paintings of that era can still be seen in the *seva*.<sup>4</sup>

After Damodar ji, Govind (1821-1846) and after him Girdhar (1843-1900) became *tilakayat* and they without any significant change continued the tradition of painting work. During this time many expert artists came to Nathdwara and among them the very prominent artist was Seelakh cast Shri Ramchandra Baba. Other artists like Hardev and Omkar were also of great importance and contributed a lot to the development of art work at Nathdwara.<sup>5</sup> Govardhanlal (1863-1934) became *tilakayat* and his period is considered to be the Golden period of Nathdwara art styles. On his birthday, a painted *Pichhavai* was presented to Shrinathji in which many Goswami family members were painted as Braja Bhakta (devotees) in *Sakhi Bhava*. Deep attachment and interest of the *tilakayat* in art was clearly visible by this incident.<sup>6</sup> During this period, artist Veniram, son of the Nanalal and artist Narayan remained prominent. Other artists of that period were Ghasiram son of Hardev, Sukhdev, Devilal, Ekling, Matthulal are worth appreciating. During Govardhan's period, Nathdwara's art style was at its zenith. That time Ghasiram was the chief artist. In his workshop, many great artists were trained to perfection. Even today, the *Pichhavai* prepared by Ghasiram is displayed behind Shrinathji, on the occasion of *Thakurani Teej* (Hindu festival). A great number of artists and disciples gather to see that *Pichhavai*.

During the period of *Tilkayat* Govardhan, many rules, and regulations relating to art were incorporated. The art of the sect was at its pinnacle at this time. During his tenure, the most talented artists were honored for their artwork with special gifts and cash prizes. He used to honor the artists coming from outside in a traditional manner, by presenting them *turban* decorated by gold *jari*, gold bangle, *uparna* or shoulder

<sup>1</sup> Lyons, Tryna, Women Artists of Nathdwara School, Representing the Body, Gender Issue in India, edited by Vidya Dahiya, Paul's Press, New Delhi, 1997, p 102.

<sup>2</sup> Sharma, B., Srinath Seva Rasodadhi, Mumbai, Rukminibai V. Karni, 1981, p 201.

<sup>3</sup> Mehta, Dr. Subhas, Gagananchal, October-December Issue, 2008, p 64.

<sup>4</sup> Sharma, B., Srinath Seva Rasodadhi, Mumbai, Rukminibai V. Karni, 1981, p 364.

<sup>5</sup> Ambalal, Amit, Srinathji Swarop Chitran ka Vikas Kram, Heerak Jayanti Grantha, Sahitya Mandal, Nathdwara, 1997, p 467.

<sup>6</sup> Mehta, Dr. Subhas, Vallabh Sampradai Chitrakala ke Vikas Me Tilkayat evam Acharyaon ki Bhomika, Heerak Jayanti Grantha, Sahitya Mandal, Nathdwara, 1997, p 465.

cloth and *paan ka beeda*.<sup>1</sup> He made many changes in the creation of the form (*swaroopa*). The face (*Mukharbind*) of Shrinathji began to be drawn a little longer than earlier. The open foot (*chamarbind*) is now in frontal position, which now looks more natural.

Damodar (1897-1936) inherited the seat from his father, Govardhan. He also gave protection to the artists similar to that of his ancestors. He presented different types of *Pichhavai* of diverse *bhavas* during different festivals. The *tilakayat* family members were depicted in the *Pichhavais* during his era, which was a great experiment. The Vaishnav disciples and followers also followed the same style of *Pichhavai*-making. Due to this, many artists got opportunity to work in plenty. Heeralal, Ambaram, Shankarlal, Narottam narayan, Damodarlal, Nandalal, Kalu and Jaggannath were the main artists of this period.

After Damodar, Govindlal (1928-1995) became *tilakayat*. He was scripted off his ruling power and the financial condition also worsened.<sup>2</sup> It affected the art field adversely. In spite of this he initiated many developmental works in the field of art. The artists were in search of possibilities in the field of portrait drawing, calendar drawings, and scenery paintings. Govindlal, Dwarkalal, Narottamnaryan, Ghanshyam, Bhooralal, Vitthal, Ghanshyam (Master Sahab), Chimanlal, B.G. Sharma, Inder Sharma, Nainsukh, Tulsidas, Rewashankar and other artists initiated new experiments and continued the traditional painting style of *Pichhavai* painting.

Dauji (Rajeev) (1949-2000) became the next *tilakayat*. He also was an art lover. Due to the improvement in the transportation facilities in Nathdwara, the number of *vaishnav bhaktas* (devotees) has increased in recent years. Tourists from India and abroad started coming here. Many art merchants opened up art shops in Nathdwara market. However, the ratio of *Pichhavai* painting has decreased. The interference of the *tilkayats* also has come down. The influence of this great style of Rajasthan is gradually lowering down. In the nearby cities, copies of Nathdwara paintings are being sold at a very cheap rate, in the name of Nathdwara paintings, which has affected the Nathdwara artists.

Rakesh (Indradaman) (1950) became *tilkayat* in 2001. Presently, the conservation by the *tilkayats* is absent especially in *Pichhavai* painting.

The style which was once the pride of province is presently losing its past glory; many artists now have started making handicraft items leaving their traditional art. Art of *Pichhavai* painting is dying.

<sup>1</sup> Sharma, B., Srinath Seva Rasodadhi, Mumbai, Rukminibai V. Karni, 1981, p 201.

<sup>2</sup> Ambalal, Amit, Krishna as Shrinathji, Mapin Publication, New York, 1987, p 73.