



# DOCUMENTATION AND REVIVAL OF *PICHWAI* PAINTING

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## ABSTRACT:

Nathdwara is the present headquarters of the *Pushti Margiya* Vaishnavite cult. Nathdwara Painting refers to a painting tradition and school of artists that emerged in Nathdwara, a town in Rajsamand district in the Western state of Rajasthan in India. The word *Pichwai* is derived from the Sanskrit words *pich* meaning back and *wais* meaning hanging. The word *Pichwai* stands for hanging at the back. *Pichwai* paintings are big-sized paintings prepared on cotton cloth using natural colours and are hung behind the idol of Lord *Shrinathji* to depict his *leelas*. The purpose of *Pichwai*, other than artistic appeal, is to narrate tales of Krishna to the illiterate. They are the devotional pictures used to portray the stories of Lord Krishna. This study attempts to document the traditional *Pichwai* painting in detail in terms of its origin, technique, motifs, designs, colours, themes and work towards the revival of the painting through product development. Secondary data was obtained through various books, articles, calico textile museum, some private collection, by visiting different vaishnav temple, museum and *vidhya vibhag* library of *mandir mandal* Nathdwara. Primary data for the study was collected through purposively selected sample practicing the *Pichwai* paintings. This paper also collates the changes in the *Pichwai* paintings in terms of making process, designs and colors used.

**Key Words:** *Pichwai*, Miniature Painting, Traditional Motifs

## INTRODUCTION:

India, the land of culture and crafts, has been known to the world for its magnificent textile arts since ages. Indian embroidered and painted textiles plays very important role in the world history of textiles. Nowadays many arts are becoming extinct; *Pichwai* painting is one of them. Last one decade due to lack of interest of educated new generation, due to not getting the value commensurate with hard work and due to migration of artists to the big cities, the pure artisans of *Pichwai* painting have remained less. And those artisans who are involved in this art believe that this is their way of devotion to Krishna and also they have only this source of income. *Pichwai* painting is one name which is almost on the verge of extinction so there is a great need to revive traditional miniature paintings and heritage textiles.

### Materials used in making of *Pichwai*



(Brushes/Colours/Fabric)

**Brush:** The Nathdwara artists work with two types of brushes. Brushes called *kalams*. The broad brush called *jara* is made from goat hair and is used in painting large areas. The detailed work is done with thin brush called *jhina* made of squirrel tail. But nowadays, due to non-availability, many painters also use brushes readily available in the market.



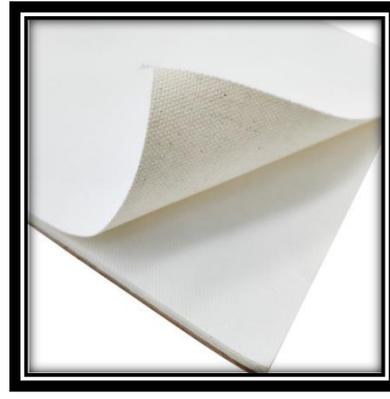
**Fabric:** Traditionally for base material fabric was used but now a days according to market demand or customer choice paper is also used for painting. Generally fine cambric cotton or silk were used for painting.



Cotton Fabric



Silk Fabric



Paper

**Colours:** *Pichwai* paintings are famous for their attractive and vibrant colours. In olden times organic and natural colors were used but in present day due to less availability of color and laborious process of color making artist prefer readily available lake and poster colors only few artists use these natural and organic colours. These colors are obtained from coal, indigo, gold, silver, saffron, zinc and other natural sources. *Pichwai* paintings are dominated by bright and deep colors like yellow, green, and black, red. Pure gold color is used in the ornamented part. The edges are decorated with crystals and other decorative elements.



### Making Process of *Pichwai* painting

There is a wide range of techniques used in making temple hangings. Although the most common and best known *Pichwai* examples are paintings on cloth, the works may also be an appliqué, a combination of paintings and appliqué, printed, embroidered or brocade. Earlier, *Pichwai* were painted on thick hand woven material, but now a thinner machine-made material is also used. Generally the cloth used is white but it is not unusual to use black, blue or red fabric. In case of coloured fabric, gold and silver are predominant colours.

The procedure for making *Pichwai* involves various steps:

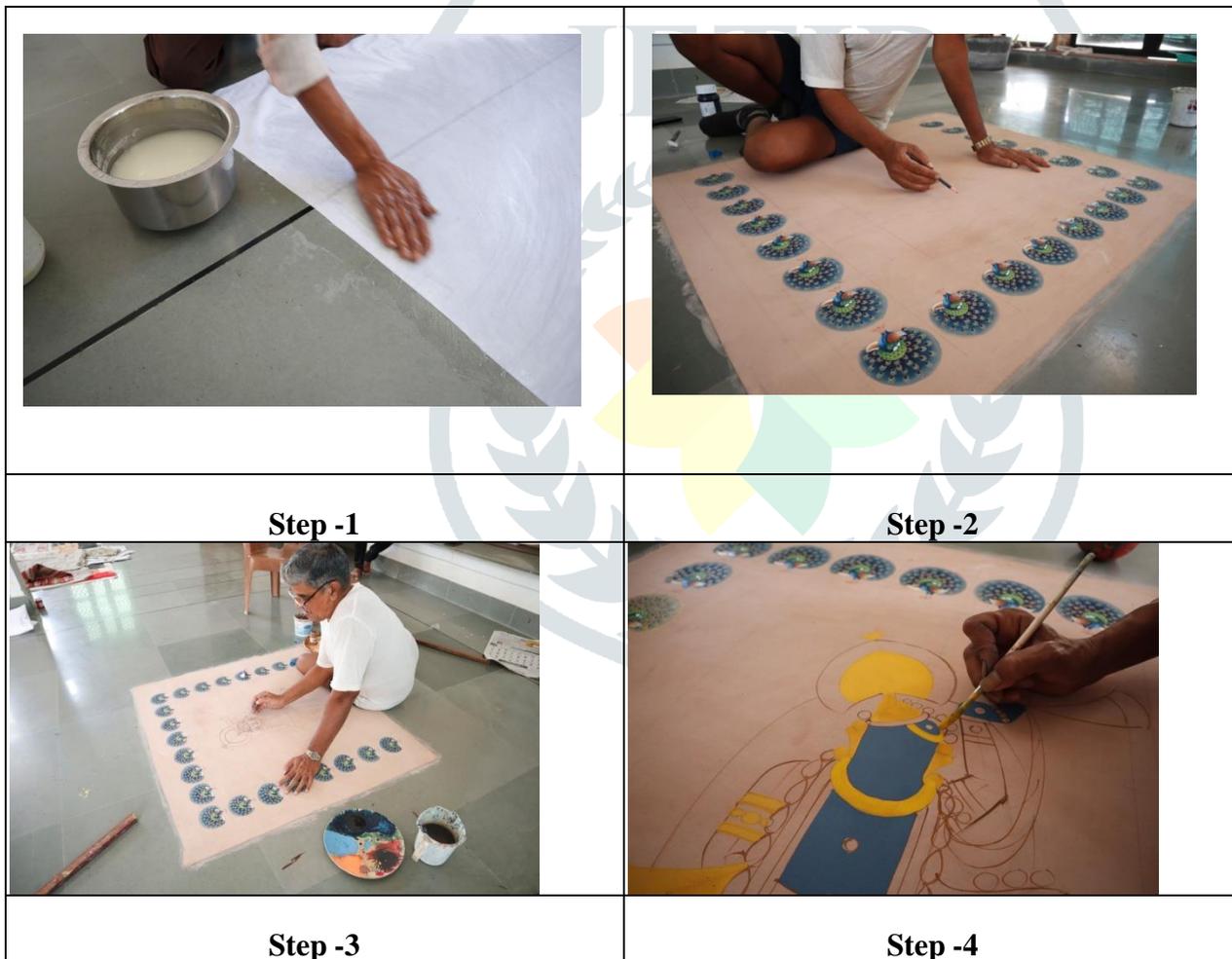
**Starching:** The cloth is first starched using a maida paste. This prevents the colours from running as well from bleeding through the material. After it dries, the cloth is ready to be painted.

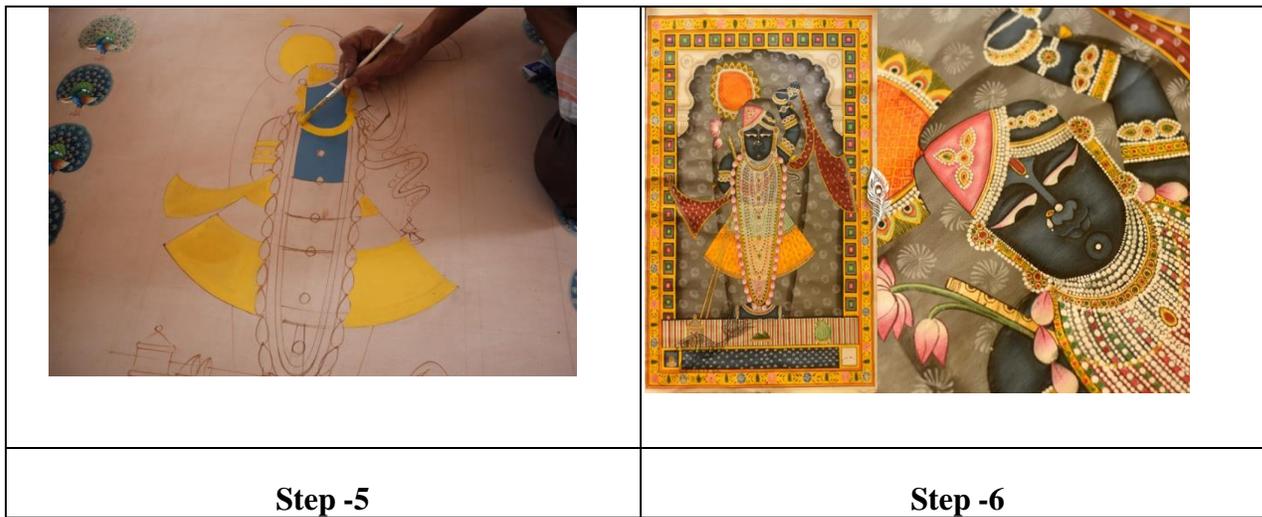
**Spacing:** The gaps on the fabric (Khaka Jamana) are done very systematically. First, the outer boundary for the boundary (boundary of the bar) that will contain the creeper shape (Bell) is marked with colored thread using a set square (Konia). The thread is dusted with charcoal or zinc white (safeda) and leaves a mark where it is placed. By the same method, the central part, which contains the main scene, is also outlined (Pitch's Marking the Spaces: The center of the inner rectangle space is determined and marked, this central point controls the distribution of the figures.

**Sketching:** The selection of sketching material is determined by the colour of the fabric. Zinc white is used on dark coloured cloth. On the white pieces, the sketching is done with the charred pointed tip of a twig from a tamarind tree. This rough sketching was called tipan. All the necessary corrections are made before the tipan is retraced with a brush dipped in sendur, (orange lead) or white paint, depending on the colour of the material. The sketch is lightly dusted with a piece of cloth and starched again before the artists begin painting.

**Painting:** Then comes the painting of figures and landscapes. When the initial dyeing is finished, the work is polished by laying the cloth face down on a smooth rock and rubbing the back side with an agate stone (ghota). Shading and detailed work is done on the figures and landscape. This finishing is called likhai among the artists of Nathdwara.

**Ornamentation:** At this stage, pearls (moti lagana) and rubies (naga chuni) are added and the gold ornaments are completed and rubbed with agate stone to give them a gloss. The final work in the figure is the addition of transparent garments. A light wash is used so that the undergarment remains visible (sari odhana). Gold butas are applied (buti banana or chundari banana). The last step is the completion of the creeper motif in the border.





### Subjects of Pichwai paintings:

The main subjects of these paintings are Shrinathji and his exploits. *Pichwai* are painted, printed with handblocks, woven, embroidered or decorated in applique. These paintings have deep religious roots and are executed with the utmost devotion of the painters. The theme of the *Pichwai* painting varies according to the season and its moods. Each *Pichwai* denotes the *seva* (worship) of *Srinathji* in a different season. The summer *Pichwai* has pink lotuses as the backdrop while the winter *Pichwai* has an intricate jamawar pattern, providing the warmth needed for the season. From dancing to eating, cow-herding to flute-playing, *Pichwai* depict the many moods of Lord Krishna. The major motifs were used cows, lotuses, *Gopis*, *Radha Ji*, peacocks and trees.

The subjects of *Pichwai* paintings are mostly depictions of various moods of Lord Krishna or various *seva* (offerings) of *Shrinathji*. These elaborately hand-painted artworks celebrate various moods and expressions of Krishna, and mostly depict temple rituals such as *Shringar* (adornment) of *Shrinathji* according to seasons or festivals in the *Pushtimarga* calendar: for example Janmashtami and Gopashtami. A popular depiction of Krishna found in *Pichwai* is the *Chappan Bhoga* (a feast of 56 dishes) which is an offering to the deity. The depiction of the elements of Indian monsoon like peacock, lotus is also found in *Pichwai* painting. Along with this, the beloved cows of Krishna are depicted prominently and frequently. Other popular themes include depictions of festivals such as Diwali, Holi, 24 Swaroop, Gopashtami, Nanda Mahotsav, Sharad Purnima, Annakoot or Govardhan Puja etc.

### Disappearance of Pichwai painting

Most of the artisans are on the verge of extinction due to the difficult process of color making and the high pricing of this art. The artisans started working on daily wages and practicing other arts to survive for their livelihood. Low availability of raw material and high cost of raw material is also the reason for the extinction of this art. Despite the increase in the level of education, the youth are not able to connect with this art. And spray painting available in the market; in the glare of Ambrose painting, supernatural painting like *Pichwai* remained confined to Vaishnav temples. As we all know that India is a heritage of rich culture and traditions, so it is necessary that every form of vanishing art is reviewed and preserved. For the conservation of this heritage art form, it is necessary to increase the entrepreneurial intervention in the market, which is essential for the perpetuation of the art forms.

### Revival of Pichwai paintings:

For the revival of traditional *Pichwai* painting, it can be transformed into wearable apparel (sarees, kurtas, dupattas, blouses, T-shirts, shirt covers etc.) and accessory items (necklaces, earrings, purses, belts etc.)., This effort will help in transforming this traditional art form into a new vision and will also give an opportunity to the painters to

experiment with new things. If traditional *Pichwai* paintings are recognized as wearable apparel, home furnishing and accessories, it can be a great source of income along with popularity. Also some design intervention can give this art a modern and contemporary look.

## Conclusion

Concluded from the above study that the traditional *Pichwai* painting is the art most artistic and flourishing art from Nathdwara which is sustained by generations of skilled craftsman. Adaptation of *Pichwai* motifs on apparels, furnishing and accessory are presents a novel and modern look and also provides a creative and fresh appearance to the individuals who want to endorse their traditional art with modern modifications. It is fascinating that our traditional heritage is now at its revival. To sustain this art form from its extinction reshaping and reconstruction of this traditional *Pichwai* painting from temple backdrop to wearable garments will enhance the marketability and productivity to create livelihood. In today's era, revitalization of traditional art is the need of the hour.

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