



Mains Practice Question

Q. The evolution of Indian painting from cave murals to miniature traditions reveals shifts in patronage and cultural narratives. Comment. (150 words)

09 Jun, 2025 GS Paper 1 Indian Heritage & Culture

Approach:

- Brief introduction to Indian painting and its historical significance.
- Discuss the evolution of Indian painting styles, from early cave murals to miniature traditions and also highlight key periods and patronage systems that shaped these artistic forms.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction:

Indian painting has a rich and **diverse tradition** that spans from ancient times to modern-day art forms. It has evolved through different periods, each influenced by varying patronage, cultural influences, and social dynamics. From the ancient cave murals of Bhimbetka to the intricate miniature traditions, the evolution of Indian painting offers insights into the changing political, religious, and social structures of India.

Body:

Early Beginnings-Cave Murals and Rock Paintings:

- The roots of Indian painting can be traced back to prehistoric times, with the **Bhimbetka cave paintings** being among the earliest examples. These paintings, located in MP, depict scenes of **daily life, hunting, and animals**, reflecting the animistic and ritualistic beliefs of early human societies.
- The rock shelters of **Bhimbetka** and **Panchmarhi** feature **petroglyphs** that offer insights into the socio-cultural dynamics of early Indian life.

Gupta Period- Rise of Religious Paintings:

- The Gupta period saw the rise of more sophisticated techniques, with an **emphasis on proportion and realism**. During this time, religious and royal patronage began to flourish, leading to the **creation of murals in temples and monasteries**.
- The themes shifted from solely religious to include courtly and royal life, with murals **depicting gods, kings**, and scenes of courtly celebrations.
- The **Ajanta Cave murals** were primarily funded by Buddhist rulers, depicting scenes from the Jataka Tales, highlighting the life and teachings of Buddha.

Regional Paintings - Rise of Miniature Art:

- **Mughal Miniature Art** flourished under emperors like Akbar and Jahangir, showcasing detailed depictions of court life, nature, and battles, created in **royal ateliers (Tasvir Khana)**.

- The Mughal era introduced **Persian artistic elements like realism**, perspective, and foreshortening, enriching Indian painting.
- Miniatures from the Mughal court, such as those in the **Tutinama and Hamzanama**, were crucial in documenting historical events and the opulence of the Mughal empire.
- **Rajput and Pahari Styles** developed regionally with vibrant colors and ornate designs, regional rajput styles such as **Mewar, Bundi, and Kishangarh** focused on romantic, religious, and courtly themes, Kishangarh's Bani Thani is a prime example.
- **Pahari paintings** from Kangra, Jammu, and Basholi featured mythological themes and emotional depth, while Deccan art blended local and Persian elements with rich, decorative styles.

South Indian Painting Traditions:

- South Indian painting evolved significantly under dynasties like the **Pallavas, Cholas, and Vijayanagara**. The Pallavas (7th century) initiated early temple murals at **Mandagapattu and Kanchipuram**, blending **royal and religious themes**.
- The Cholas (9th–13th century) advanced this tradition with murals at **Brihadeeswarar Temple**, **vividly portraying stories of Shiva** and asserting divine kingship through temple art.
- Later, the **Vijayanagara Empire (14th–17th century)** fused architectural and artistic styles, as seen in the murals of **Virupaksha Temple at Hampi**, characterized by **bold lines, large eyes, and mythological themes**.

Modern Painting:

- With the advent of **British colonial rule**, Indian painting underwent significant changes. The **Bengal School of Art, led by artists like Abanindranath Tagore**, rejected European influences and sought to rediscover India's artistic heritage.
 - **Abanindranath's iconic painting, Bharat Mata**, symbolized a national identity and the spiritual essence of India.
- In the modern era, notably in the works of **Raja Ravi Varma**, known as the "Raphael of the East" who fused Indian mythology with European techniques.

Conclusion:

Each phase in the development of Indian art reveals the **shifting political, social, and religious contexts** in which it flourished. Whether through royal commissions, religious patronage, or colonial influences, Indian painting has played a vital role in narrating the history, traditions, and values of Indian society, continuing to evolve as a vibrant and diverse art form.