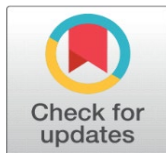
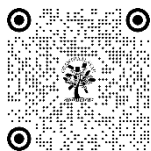


AN ABUNDANCE OF SEMI-ABSTRACTION IN INDIAN PAINTING

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ABSTRACT

Since ancient times, semi-abstraction has been found in the form of stylization of natural and geometrical motifs employed on any artefact or any other expression of art. The earthen wares excavated from Harappa, the capitals from the Mauryan Period, and the railing and toranas from Sanchi are the legacy of Indian art in the form of stylized sculptures and relief works. Which have survived after the ravages of ages and natural calamities. Keeping aside the murals of the Ajanta caves, the painting as a perishable form of art has been found since only the Pala and Jaina periods. Since then, stylization has been abundantly used in every style as an integrated feature of Indian Art. Semi-abstraction is the middle stage of any modification from real to fully abstract form. The unique style of Kishangarh, Ragmala series from Mewar, the depiction of themes from Gita Govinda of Jaidev, and female figures from the Basoli, Kangra, and Garhwal present examples of semi-abstraction and stylization. During the modern art movement of the 20th century, the renowned artist named Jaimin Roy has excelled in this traditional technique of semi-abstraction and stylization. This study shows how the semi-abstraction works and how it is used. Understanding its limitations is a very necessary part of keeping the semi-abstract and stylized artwork graceful. This study also throws light on the use of idealism in semi-abstract or stylized art. Contrary to Naturalism's hardships for perfect resemblance, Indian artist has been mainly concerned with the soul of the subject matter.

Keywords: Semi-Abstraction, Stylization, Metaphor, Symbolism



1. INTRODUCTION

As we talk about the style of Indian painting, we do not think of a particular style; rather, we find versatility in it. Since ancient times the artist has been using various mediums and styles to express his inner world on any surface. Along with this, he has also made changes in the forms and motifs that he used in his compositions. Some of the artists have taken these forms completely away from their real appearance, some made them identifiable to some extent, and some tried to keep them close to reality as much as they could. These transformations in the appearance of forms have been classified usually as the realistic, the semi-abstract, and the abstract. Among these, the semi-abstraction is abundantly prevalent in Indian Painting. Although this term is not acknowledged worldwide. Even then, the people connected to the art, commonly use it to define some specific kind of artwork, which carries the mixed features of abstract and realistic art. So, an artwork is called semi-abstract when it is not too far from its reality or real appearance, but has some basic features through which the spectator can identify it easily. Any subject matter modified by the artist through stylization but remains easily recognizable is known as semi-abstract (semiabstract, 2023). The changes and transformations brought by an artist in the natural and conventional appearance of any subject matter make it stylized (stylized, n.d.). Changes and distortions are made conceptually and very intensively so that they can enhance their aesthetic value and make the artist's expression or purpose successful. Consequently, the artwork becomes highly stylized in its appearance.

These two terms are used interchangeably very often. There are many reasons behind its prevalence in any artwork. It makes any creation interesting, aesthetically rich, attractive, liberal, and most preferably a true messenger of the creator's thoughts. Semi-abstraction or stylization is beautifully incorporated into any artwork with the help of metaphors. And it leaves a long-lasting effect on the mindscape of the spectator. It also makes the forms idealized when they are metaphorically attached to their best versions. If a person or an object is described in such an explanation or expression that refers to another thing possessing the same features, it is called metaphorical (metaphor, n.d.). Such as, in Indian Painting, an artist with the help of semi-abstraction/stylization makes changes in the actual forms to the extent that these are made metaphorically related to some other phenomenon or object e.g. eyebrows are connected to the bow, eyes to the deer's eyes or almond shape, fair complexion to the white marble, hair to the black clouds, lips to the colour of the rising sun, etc.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Indian artists have stylized the different attributes of nature to create beauty. They have made this stylization based on the principles related to aesthetics, metaphor, and philosophy. For any intellectual and creative purpose, Indian artists have always taken help from nature. Indian culture and philosophy set a strong connection between the different elements of nature and the different deities. Such as the mountains, rivers, and specific trees have been considered related to different deities or even deities themselves. Since the Harappan Civilization, such motifs related to nature have been employed by Indian artists. And due to this long journey of development, these natural motifs have taken the shape of stylized forms. Where the shapes of flora, fauna, geometry, and human figures have been in abundance. We also see many artefacts adorned with some linear and stylized patterns, highlighting the importance of stylization in Indian art. Earthen wares in red and black colour also present an example of stylization. These wares hold a decoration of stylized motifs related to nature and geometry. After the Indus Valley civilization, the Mauryan Art witnessed the employment of stylization among different types of motifs. The capitals from this period adorn beautiful decorations, in which stylized floral and vegetal motifs can be seen. This tradition of stylization has been continued in almost every phase of Indian art history. After the remarkable Mauryan Art, the Jatakas related to the stories of Buddha's life, provide ample opportunities for the use of stylization. Here on the pillars, toranas, and medallions from Sanchi, we find an abundance of floral and vegetal motifs. Among these motifs, the foliages of the different types of trees express a higher degree of stylization (Saxena, 2016). As we all know, India is a land where diversity is found in almost every sphere of life. Its different religions, castes, and communities have different traditions and cultural values. So, the different art forms of our country have their unique features, making them stand apart from others. This uniqueness is the result of style. Talking about Rajput miniature painting, its main divisions, Rajasthani and Pahadi, are based on geographical situations. But these two major divisions have been divided further into various branches due to their different styles. So stylization plays a major role in making the art forms unique and vibrant as well. Different styles like Mewar, Jodhpur, Kishangarh, Kota, Bikaner of Rajasthani division, and Basohli, Guler, Kangra, Mandi, Kullu, Bilaspur, and Garhwal of Pahadi division all have achieved some distinctive features with the implication of semi-abstraction or stylization. The artist has implied this technique in all motifs he has used in the compositions. It can be seen in human figures, birds, animals, trees, water waves, and even in the drawing of clouds in the sky.

In Abstract art, the spectator cannot see any object clearly in the artwork, but they just see and observe it like an illusion or a glimmer. Here, the artist always tries to bring the effect of abstraction in his work. This method makes any artwork complex and mysterious, and stretches the spectator's curiosity about the work longer. Since ancient times, symbolism has been used by man to express his thoughts quickly and effectively. And its grace and value are increasing continuously. Almost all the arts have been connected with symbolism (Mawari, 1994). In symbolism, the symbols play an important role in the indication of any other specific object or phenomenon. Thus, symbolism is necessarily connected with signs and has its relation with optical experience, creativity, and aesthetic sense. In any example, when we find the execution of symbolism, we see a deep bond between the symbol or sign and the thing or phenomenon that has been signified with its contribution. In India, since ancient times, symbols have been an integral part of religion. These symbols were mainly the anthropomorphic forms of natural forces or phenomena, like the Linga- a symbol of Shiva, the black color buffalo- a symbol of Yama (the God of death), the boar- a symbol of Lord Vishnu's incarnation, and many others (Pande, 1994). In the caves of Ajanta, we find that the artist has utilized the effect of symbolism and representation in the depiction of stories related to Buddha. To convey the teachings and values of Buddhism effectively, the monks living in the caves of Ajanta converted these non-living rocky shelters into a vibrating and lively treasure. They employed

representation and symbolic methods here to illustrate or picture the main features of Buddha's life, i.e., intelligence, good character, service to mankind, and compassion. In the Ajanta Caves, the earlier murals show the depiction of the Hinayana influence, under which Buddha was shown through symbols or with the help of metaphor. The Jataka tales related to the Buddha were also illustrated metaphorically.

Figure 1



Figure 1 The Mother and Child Before the Buddha, Cave no.17, Ajanta

Source <https://cavesofindia.org/category/ajanta-caves/cave-17/page/4/>

Figure 2



Figure 2 Bodhisattva Padmapani, Late 5th Century, Ajanta Caves, Maharashtra State, India

Source <https://www.tallengestore.com/products/bodhisattva-padmapani-ajanta-buddhist-caves-painting-2nd-century-bce-large-art-prints>

A mural painting named, i.e., "Figure 1. The Mother and Child before the Buddha," is also an example of the symbolic execution of abstraction. With the larger size of Buddha's body, in comparison to the mother and child, the artist connected it metaphorically to His spiritual excellence over the ordinary people (Tomory, 1989). We also see the execution of semi-abstraction and symbolism in these world-famous Ajanta Cave Paintings. The colours are also very symbolic here. These colours express the Buddhist teachings and the ideology to the viewers. In cave no.1, the famous painting, i.e., "Figure 2. Padampani Bodhisatva," is also an example of semi-abstraction and symbolism. The figure of the Bodhisatva has been shown bigger than life size to create symbolism for his greatness. His mental state has been

expressed beautifully through his facial features. Every feature of the Bodhisatva's face and body has been drawn metaphorically. The body postures and facial gestures have been beautifully employed by the artist to create a wonderful emotional drama. Together with this Padampani Bodhisatva, all the paintings of Ajanta contribute to the showcasing of emotional, cultural, traditional, and religious aspects of human life (Ravindra Torawane, 2018).

The very first pieces of evidence of Indian Painting in the form of manuscript painting are the Pala and Jaina paintings from the Eastern and Western regions of India. The Jaina manuscripts have executed the stylization of the figures in the manner of vigorous distortion. Different body parts like the eyes, fingers, breasts, and hips have been stretched with exaggeration. Here, the particular method of stretching the features opposes the effects of stylization into an unusual distortion (Painting, n.d.). The Ragmala series of the Mewar school is a famous example of illustrated text where semi-abstraction and stylization have incorporated the painting among different subject matters taken from music, poetry, and religion (Lahoti, 2024). At this centre of Rajasthani miniature painting, the artist mainly used traditional Indian painting techniques except for a few Mughal features. For example, they employed the bird-eye perspective of the Mughals in some paintings. We find the steep planes with different types of elements depicted in a flat and very stylized manner by the Mewari artists. Later, in the second half of the 18th century, under Raja Savant Singh, the artists stylized the physiognomy of the figures of their most favourite subjects, Shri Krishna and Radha. They used these supernaturally beautiful figures metaphorically for the union of the soul and the divine (Kossak, 1997).

Figure 3



Figure 3 Bani Thani, Kishangarh, Rajasthan, c. 1750

Source

https://hi.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E0%A4%9A%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%A4%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%B0:4_Radha_%28Bani_Thani%29,_Kishangarh,_ca._1750,_National_Museum_New_Delhi.jpg

In most of the Rajasthani paintings, different patterns, forms, and motifs used by the artists in the forms of birds, animals, and humans were metaphorically connected to beautiful natural creatures like parrot, peacock, sparrow, elephants, horse, and the lady named 'Bani Thani' (Figure 3. Bani Thani," (Janmay Singh Hada, 2014). "Tears Irrigate the Garden of Love", written by Raja Sawant Singh of Kishangarh, is very famous for the use of metaphoric language. His great devotion to Radha Krishna and love for his maid Bani Thani are made subject in another poem named "The Garden of Love". He commissioned several artworks showing the affairs of Radha and Krishna metaphorically in a stylized way (Markel, 2015). In the mini-size Rajasthani Paintings, themes related to Radha Krishna, music, epics, and the Hindu religion were executed with the combination of purity of love and arousing picturization. Feminine glamour and beauty were promoted metaphorically in a very stylized manner. With the help of stylization, artists enriched the human figures along with their serene expressions (Sharma, 2016). Several artists had worked under the Persian artists in the Mughal courts, and they blended it with local Rajput style with some stylization and developed a new version adopted and practiced by artists at different places of Rajasthan like Bundi, Mewar, Kotah, Kishangarh, and Jaipur. Later, Nihal Chand from Kishangarh embodied this new version with too-magnified features in his paintings (Rekha Pande, 2019).

An artist named Bhawani Das, trained under the Mughal Empire, was a master of portrait making. In 1719, he shifted to Kishangarh during the time of Raja Raj Singh. His son Dalchand also learned from him the art of portrait making, and later he shifted to the Jodhpur region of Rajasthan. It is considered that these Mughal Empire returned artists brought or invented a new style with the assimilation of the Rajput style, in which we see an abundance of unbroken surfaces and prominent line work. With the introduction of stylization, they made the eyes and the back too curvaceous. Later, Nihal Chand, the favorite artist of Raja Sawant Singh, utilized these features in his works. He gave an idealized touch to the locations of Braj in the form of very pleasant and peaceful settings in his paintings (Losty, 2019). During the period of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, so many artists left the court and took shelter in the mountainous regions of Rajasthan under the Hindu Kings of independent states. They used their artistic skills according to the requirements of the local patrons they adopted. This new experiment made Rajput art very distinctive and related to the abstract (metaphysical) world. Themes taken from the Gita Govinda of Jaidev were picturized with the help of stylization. Some of the Rajasthani schools have also used stylization among the number of motifs depicted in the compositions. They stylized the waves of the water into very thin and small lines. The effect of rain has been simplified and stylized in the form of vertical white lines with small dots. In most of the paintings, the sky is shown with the help of a curvy line drawn with a free-hand brush stroke (Rao, 2022). In the state of Rajasthan, a foreigner named Eric Dickinson, a college professor at Ajmer, once visited the location of Kishangarh in 1943 and discovered the stylistic and wonderful artwork mainly done by the artist Nihal Chand, who was the favorite artist of Raja Sawant Singh. Among these unique and highly stylized artworks, a painting of Bani Thani set the new norms of beauty and style. Using stylization, the artist enlarged and elongated the physical features and beautified them metaphorically. Being a great devotee of Radha Krishna, Raja Sawant Singh wrote several poems to praise them. His main artist, Nihal Chand, characterised him and Bani Thani (Raja's beloved) as Krishna and Radha. In the drawing of Bani Thani, the artist stylized and beautified her features to the extent that the spectator can see the fascinating beauty of Radha. Her sharp and long eyebrows recall any arch, bow, and the shape of lotus petals. Her conical chin and very fine lips just make us recall the Indian sculpture. Her stylized features made her a muse for many paintings later (Ghosh, 2022). In older times, iconic books like Vishnudharmottara and Chitrastotra played a vital role in guiding and inspiring the artist. And also solved his queries and complications related to the artwork. Chitrastotra has been a treasure for the artist to understand the use of a colour, like how to choose a particular colour according to the requirement, its mixing proportion, drawing, the effectiveness of lines, different ways of rendering, and all the details of different motifs used in the composition. This book also helped the artist in the metaphorical and symbolic implementation of different natural creatures or things. With the help of stylization, the artist inculcated astonishing beauty in different forms used in the compositions. The knowledge from these books also explains the creation of beautiful eyes and facial expressions. This guideline and the help can be seen in the fluent linear work in the Ajanta Cave Paintings (Sheikh, 2023). Art from Kishangarh, Rajasthan, revolves absolutely around the Radha Krishna and their love expressions. The artist has used metaphors in abundance here. The graceful body of Radha has been compared with the shape of a fish, the neck with suraahi (a long and slim neck water container), and the eyes with a bow, etc (Dwivedi, 2010). Under the patronage of Raja Pratap Singh, the artwork at the Jaipur Palace was metaphorically and stylistically related to the Vaishnav cult. The facial features in the artworks were inspired by the Kishangarh style, and with the help of great stylization, the shape of the eyes was made curvy and wider (Aitken, 2011).

The different sub-centres under the Pahadi school of miniature painting have a uniqueness based on style. This style has also been known as 'Kalam'. To set such particular styles, the artists of these sub-centres, have played a major role. The renowned artists like Manak, Nainsukh, and Devidas are credited for the stylization of the Basoli art form. The stylized forehead, nose, face, chin, and dreaming eyes have made the figures of ladies completely fascinating. Basoli miniature paintings are full of different types of trees and their stylized foliage (Jeratha, 1998). In Indian painting, style has always been in continuous development. The ideals of Indian spirituality have also been an important part of Indian aesthetics. This development and the gradual growth of the style are seen in Western Indian manuscript paintings and the miniature paintings from other parts of the country. The artist has taken the help of linear decorations to enhance the fame and the glory of the subject in the manuscripts and the miniature paintings. This beautiful linear work of Indian painting becomes its identity as a simple and stylized art form. M. S. Randhava's 'Kangra Painting on Love' remarks on the presence of several flora and fauna depicted in pahadi style in the Kangra miniature paintings. These nature-based motifs have been depicted in an idealistic and stylized manner rather than realistically. This stylistic rendering of the different motifs creates a melodious effect in Kangra miniature painting. It also connects this Pahadi style with its roots, i.e., Indian art. The artists from these Pahadi regions, called 'Pahadi Masters,' have unique stylistic identities. They have expressed beautifully the stylistic spirit of Indian art through their style (Raha, 2023).

In the beginning, the Kangra artists generated a distinctive style, which was the combination of some Mughal and traditional Indian art elements. By portraying the supernaturally beautiful figures of Radha and Krishna, they symbolized the devotion of the common man's soul to God (Prasad, 2018). Pahadi miniature paintings are known for their beauty and symbolism (Singh D. N., 2022). In Kangra miniature painting, artists have employed different natural elements to execute symbolism. They have used it in specific colours like red and yellow. They also depicted the flowers, moon, and clouds in the compositions for symbolism (Singh D. V., 2024). By avoiding the modelling of the human figures and depicting the hair in the form of a flat mass without minute details, the artists have beautifully utilised the stylization (Chand, 2016). One of the major sub-centres of the Pahari school of miniature painting is Garhwal. It has also excelled in the depiction of highly remarkable feminine beauty. Molaram, the founder artist of Garhwal style, evolved a unique style that is the combination of his inspiration from Kangra painting and his creativity. Garhwal artists have also stylized the figures in a similar pahadi style, where we can see small faces, narrow eyes, uplifted eyebrows, and curvy lips (Joshi, 2019).

As the Indian painting has been free and liberal from the strict rules of naturalism that prevailed in the West, Indian artists have beautified their compositional motifs supernaturally. In a painting from the Bhagavata Purana named 'Krishna Lifting Mount Govardhana,' we see a beautiful stylization of clouds in the sky. The stylized forms of swirling clouds, with different tones of grey, surround Mount Govardhana, lifted by Krishna. The artist has successfully employed stylization in the beautiful and extraordinary composition. After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, a technical change was seen. Now, the artist started to unfollow the Mughal inspiration and increased the stylization of the forms. In a painting from Bikaner, Rajasthan, named 'A cow carrying the earth on her horns,' we see a beautiful and stylized landscape. During the second half of the 18th century, naturalism and perspective were left out of Rajasthani painting. In place of realism, decoration and stylization were set into the trend (Ahluwalia, 2008). The result of the modification in different subject matters for stylization should always be enriched with an aesthetic sense. This conceptual activity of transformation or modification of natural and conventional forms looks like a game played by an artist (Kaushik Bhattacharya, 2021).

During the modern art movement of the early 20th century, the artists rejected Western art and its practices. They followed the Indian religion and mythology for their subjects. A Patua artist of this period named Jaimini Roy, inspired by tribal art, experimented a lot with Indian subjects. This keen experimentation with the subject made his artwork highly stylized. Simple forms, bold line-work, and flat colours express the inclusion of semi-abstraction. In the series 'Krishna Leela,' Krishna as a child is depicted sitting on his mother Yashodha's lap. Two more figures of devotees standing on both sides of Yashodha become part of this highly stylized composition. Bigger eyes on the side profiles have no eyeballs at all, which indicates the mastery and the skill of the artist for the use of semi-abstraction and stylization (Agrawal, 2020).

3. METHODOLOGY

In this paper, with the help of a qualitative approach, an analytical study has been done. For this purpose, to analyze the abundance and prevalence of semi-abstraction or stylization in Indian Painting, data have been researched in books, research papers, research articles, and images.

4. DISCUSSION

By reviewing the available literature, it is found that Indian Painting has been completely versatile and liberal when we talk about its style, its genre, and its nature. Instead of focusing on the formal and strict concept of Realistic Art, art in India has given preference to its multi-dimensional way of expression or execution. Indian art has sheltered all types and styles irrespective of their medium, texture, context, and background. Indian artists have utilized the traditional tenets of art to make a unique, expressive, and real image of our culture. Artists in India have not been bound by the strict rules of formalization in art, like the Naturalistic or Realistic arts of the Western world. After moving away from realism, he produced more charm and sensation in his artwork than in any realistic artwork. His artwork is not only an imitation of physical appearance but also an expression of the soul of the subject and the artist. For this purpose, Indian art provides a variety of options in the form of stylization, symbolism, and the use of metaphor, through which an artist can achieve his goal. Like an abstractionist, who makes his work symbolic or representative by excluding or including the features or parts of the subject, an Indian artist makes his artwork stylized or metaphoric by intensive modification or

distortion in the form and the features of the subject. This kind of change in the real image of any object refers to semi-abstractness. However, in the literature, this term has not been used in the context of Indian art. Rather, stylized and symbolic terms have been used here in Indian art. This type of artwork generally seems to be very easy to depict, but it requires a deep aesthetic sense to make true justification for its expression or narration.

Indian art has been based on traditional principles and values. Where the shadangas, 'six limbs of Indian art', play a major role. Indian artist, keeping his artwork linked to these shadangas, always tries to make it aesthetically sound. He makes his artwork filled with 'rasa', which is the crux of Indian aesthetic theory. Together with other elements, stylization and semi-abstractness contribute a lot to making any artwork aesthetically sound. Ajanta cave paintings also remark on the utilization of stylization and symbolism. Here, in so many paintings, the physical posture and the facial gestures have played a vital role in conveying the story and the message to its viewers. Due to the diversity of Indian culture, Indian painting also appeared with diversity. Some of these varied painting styles have unique features that have also become their identities. In Rajput miniature painting, there are many sub-schools in the form of its branches. One of its branches, named Mewar School, has been famous for its illustrated texts. Here, the artist has taken his subjects from Indian music, poetry, and religion. With stylization, use of metaphor, and semi-abstractness, the artist wisely converted the texts into visual forms. During the period of Raja Savant Singh of Kishangarh, these stylizations and symbolism were at their peak. Male and female figures in Kishangarh paintings were metaphorically connected with Radha and Krishna. With the help of stylization and semi-abstractness, artist beautified their physical features supernaturally. The shape of the eyes, eyebrows, nose, lips, and chin, along with extraordinarily curved hair curls on the side profile, have become the identity of these paintings.

Instead of human figures this use of stylization is also seen in other living and non-living motifs of the compositions. In a Rajasthani-style painting from Bhagavata Purana named 'Krishna Lifting the Mount Govardhana,' stylized grey clouds are seen hovering on the lifted Mount Govardhana. During the 18th century, as the Mughal Empire declined, artists started to abandon the practices of naturalism and perspective that were previously enforced by the Mughals after being inspired by European art. Now, the artist was liberal in his expression. With the help of stylization, semi-abstractness, and the use of metaphor, he modified his subjects to justify them according to the context. He also changed and modified the natural proportions of the motifs, whether they were living or non-living. Indian painting 'Bani-Thani' by Nihal Chand from Rajasthan presents a clear example of the appropriate use of stylization and symbolism. This very technique has been an integral part of Indian Art. It has facilitated the core motive of Indian art.

5. CONCLUSION

"Abstraction allows man to see with his mind what he cannot see physically with his eyes... Abstract art enables to perceive beyond the tangible, to extract the infinite out of the finite. It is the emancipation of the mind. It is an exploration into unknown areas." – Arshile Gorky (BAENZIGER, n.d.). Skilled hands and an aesthetically versed mind can make any artwork a masterpiece by introducing semi-abstractness in the form of stylization, symbolism, and metaphor. It also facilitates the artist to combine his art with social values and culture. The intensive use of semi-abstractness in the art makes its impact evergreen. In this research study, the reviewed literature strengthens that stylization, semi-abstractness, and the use of metaphor have been an integral part of Indian painting. Since the earliest examples of painting found in Pala and Jaina manuscripts, we find that the artist has stylized the subject according to the context and the factors affecting the art and the artist. In comparison to European painting, Indian painting has been more expressive rather than based on realism or naturalism. It has emphasised more on the inner world of the subject rather than focusing on the outlook or the resemblance. And to achieve this very purpose, stylization proved very helpful. But this technique also demands some precautions that the artist must keep in mind. Such modifications and abstractions are being attempted on the subject, done very carefully. It should enhance the aesthetic quality rather than making it unnecessarily deteriorated. This research study can help understand the nature and the basic principles of Indian painting.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

There are no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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