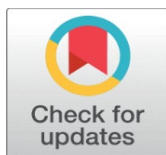


IMPORTANCE OF FLORA PAINTINGS IN INDIAN ART AND MYTHOLOGY

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Received 20 December 2024

Accepted 12 January 2025

Published 07 February 2025

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DOI

[10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i1.2025.5921](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i1.2025.5921)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Since ancient times, India has had a tradition of worshipping objects that serve its needs, evidenced in the Vedas and Puranas, and their significance in our lives has been written and painted in many books, texts, and on walls. This research paper discusses flora paintings and their relevance in Indian art and mythology. Indian art is known for its rich tradition of depicting nature. Flora in Indian art is a medium to express the interrelationship of the divine and natural world. Through flora paintings, artists depict the sanctity of nature, drawing inspiration from ancient texts, folklore and religious traditions. Many trees, plants, flowers, mountains, and rivers symbolize fertility and wisdom. In mythology, flora has symbolic significance, representing deities and cosmic forces. How artists from different groups and periods have captured the essence of the natural world through brushstrokes and vibrant colors invites contemplation on the interconnectedness of all living beings. The researcher using secondary data and descriptive research methodology, this paper re-examines the role of flora painting in promoting societal expression and needs. Finally, the paper presents a detailed analysis of how different regions depict flora in the context of their local myths and religious beliefs and highlights the diversity and richness of Indian art.

Keywords: Buddhism Art, Flora Painting, Hinduism Art, Indian Art, Islamic Art, Jainism Art, Mythology

1. INTRODUCTION

The depiction of nature is seen in many forms in India. From prehistoric art to the present, it has been shown in various forms. For example, miniature paintings (Mughal, Rajasthani, Pahari and Rajput) display beauty and peace in Pala and Jain styles. In the 20th century, the Bengal School of Art was known for reviving Indian traditions. In the traditional arts of India, glimpses of nature are also seen in the form of depictions of trees, plants and animals. Gardens, flowers and landscapes are prominently shown. Pahari-style paintings, such as Kangra and Basohli, display beauty and peace through natural scenes. Contemporary artists also present nature in various abstract and semi-abstract forms in their art. The depiction of nature also

displays natural beauty and traditions in Indian art. Flora paintings in Indian art combine the natural world with spiritual and symbolic elements from mythology. Flora paintings symbolize various aspects of divinity and spiritual realms in Indian art. Every flower and plant is symbolically associated with some deity and has its own meaning. For example, the lotus is usually associated with deities, representing purity, wisdom and divine grace. The depiction of flora in paintings as a visual representation of these religious associations gives spiritual significance to the artwork. Flora paintings contribute to the visual representation of mythology and epics in Indian art. Flowers, trees and plants are depicted as integral elements in scenes depicting mythological events and stories. For example, the Kalpavriksha as the cosmic tree, as well as, the forest setting becomes the backdrop for various encounters and adventures of deities and mythological creatures. Flora paintings help to bring these mythological tales alive and add depth and context. In Indian mythology, flora and fauna are important in religious rituals and devotional practices. The practice of flora painting involves offering flowers to deities or creating floral garlands for worship. Such paintings reflect the importance of flora with devotion and reverence. The depiction of lush gardens, flourishing trees and blooming flowers reflects a belief in the order and balance inherent in the universe. Flora paintings in Indian art symbolize the interconnectedness of all living beings and the cyclical nature of life. Flora's paintings remind us of humanity's place within the natural order and the importance of preserving and respecting the environment. Flora paintings in Indian art and mythology intertwine the realms of spirituality, symbolism, and visual aesthetics. They deepen the understanding of mythological narratives, convey spiritual concepts, and celebrate the beauty and significance of flora within India's cultural and religious context. Flora paintings in Indian art also celebrate the sheer aesthetic beauty of plants and flowers. Artists skillfully capture vibrant colors, intricate details, and delicate forms of flora, creating visually appealing and captivating artworks. These paintings evoke a sense of wonder and appreciation for the natural world, inviting viewers to connect with the beauty and serenity found in flora. [Chanda-Vaz \(2019\)](#)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The investigation of floral motifs within Indian art and their associated mythological meanings is extensively documented in numerous academic publications. In "Indian Painting: The Lesser-Known Traditions," edited by Anna L. Dallapiccola, a collection of essays explores the diverse regional painting styles in India, illustrating how floral elements are intricately interwoven with local myths and religious narratives. Lotika Varadarajan's "Floral Motifs in Indian Textiles" similarly analyzes the design, symbolism, and cultural relevance of floral patterns, particularly in textiles, and their ties to mythology, showcasing the continuity of these themes across various artistic expressions. Wilfrid Blunt and William T. Stearn's "The Art of Botanical Illustration" offers a historical perspective on botanical art, including discussions on plants' symbolic and mythological roles in Indian artistic traditions. In "Flora's Empire: British Gardens in India," Eugenia W. Herbert examines the influence of British colonialism on Indian floral art, emphasizing the blending of British and Indian botanical practices and their incorporation of mythological elements. David R. Kinsley's "Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition" provides valuable insights into the symbolic representation of flowers in the iconography of Hindu goddesses, investigating their mythological connections. Nanditha Krishna and M. Amirthalingam's "Sacred Plants of India" concentrates on the sacred flora

referenced in Indian mythology, addressing their religious and cultural significance as well as their artistic representations. Richard Evans Schultes and Albert Hofmann's "Plants of the Gods: Their Sacred, Healing, and Hallucinogenic Powers" adopts a broader perspective, examining the sacred status of plants in Indian mythology and their portrayal in religious art. Lastly, Som Prakash Varma's "Flora and Fauna in Mughal Art" investigates the representation of floral imagery in Mughal paintings, emphasizing the amalgamation of Persian, Indian, and European artistic influences that define this era. Collectively, these scholarly contributions offer a thorough understanding of the intricate relationship between floral motifs and their mythological significance in Indian art. [Edu \(2022\)](#)

2.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyze the historical evolution of flora paintings in Indian art.
- To understand the symbolic meanings of various plants and flowers in Indian art and mythology.
- To examine the techniques and styles used in flora paintings across different periods.
- To explore the role of flora in religious and mythological narratives.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is to further knowledge of the artistic processes, symbolic interpretations, and historical development of flora paintings, with a focus on their cultural and religious significance in Indian mythology and art. I have researched and examined a number of art schools that emphasize diversity in themes and styles. The research attempts to better grasp flora's cultural and religious importance in Indian art and mythology. In this study, I have used various secondary data sources, including books, journals, research papers, and artifacts. It uses descriptive research methods to examine several developments in Indian art and mythology. [Fergusson \(2023\)](#)

4. THE FLORA PAINTING IN INDIAN ART

The importance of flowers in Indian culture is not just limited to paintings. Flowers are also used in many religious ceremonies and rituals. In Indian art, many plants and flowers are associated with specific deities, rituals and religious practices. Nature painting in artwork emphasizes the religious and spiritual aspects of Indian culture and helps convey the stories of religious texts. Flora Painting in Indian Art The intricate details and vibrant colors in floral motifs add to the visual richness and beauty of paintings, sculptures, textiles, and architectural elements. Apart from its cultural and spiritual significance, Flora painting in India also reflects the natural environment. Artists have historically depicted various plant species in a lifelike manner, contributing to the world of India's diverse flora. Floral motifs and paintings are widely used in Indian rituals and ceremonies. India is considered a multicultural country and flora paintings are also seen in folk and tribal arts. These art forms are deeply rooted in local traditions and demonstrate the relationship between communities and their natural environment. Indian art uses geometric patterns, including floral designs, to create sacred art such as mandalas and yantras. These intricate geometric designs are used for meditation, religious ceremonies, and spiritual contemplation. Floral paintings in Indian art reflect the geographical and ecological features of the country. Different regions have their own unique styles

and depictions of flora, which showcase the rich culture of India. Flora paintings, especially in ancient and traditional art forms, help preserve India's artistic and cultural heritage. They link to the past and provide valuable insights into the historical and artistic evolution of the country. In modern and contemporary Indian art, flora continues to be a popular and evolving theme. Artists draw inspiration from traditional motifs while experimenting with new techniques and styles, keeping the tradition alive and relevant in the contemporary art scene. Flora painting in Indian art is vital to the country's cultural, religious, and artistic heritage. It serves as a visual language that conveys meaning, beauty, and spirituality while reflecting the deep connection between the people of India and the natural world surrounding them.

4.1. FLORA PAINTING OF MYTHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE IN INDIAN ART

Flora painting in Indian art from a mythological perspective involves the depiction of various plant life, flowers, and trees with specific symbolic and religious significance in Hindu mythology and other Indian traditions. These depictions often play a crucial role in conveying spiritual and cultural narratives. Flora paintings from a mythological perspective in Indian art not only present aesthetic appeal in the artworks but also convey deep spiritual and cultural meaning. It serves as a visual language to narrate stories, express the divine qualities of the gods and goddesses, and evoke a sense of sacredness and reverence in the viewer. These depictions bring together art, mythology, and spirituality, creating a rich cultural expression connection in India. [Kadam \(2016\)](#)

4.2. HINDUISM

Flora paintings hold great significance in Hinduism as there is deep symbolism and spiritual meaning associated with various plants, flowers and trees within the religion. Many plants and flowers in Hinduism have symbolic meaning that is associated with divine qualities. For example, the lotus symbolizes purity and wisdom, while the banyan tree represents longevity and spiritual enlightenment. Flora paintings are painted alongside Hindu deities such as Krishna with a lotus pond, Vishnu with a lotus, and beautiful images of Flora Goddesses (Van Devi). Flora paintings allow artists to express these qualities visually, making them accessible to worshipers and art lovers. Hindu temples and sacred spaces often feature intricate floral designs and paintings. These decorations create an aesthetically pleasing and spiritually uplifting atmosphere for worshipers. Floral motifs and paintings are used to enhance the visual appeal of sacred spaces and altars, making them more conducive to meditation and devotion. The biggest example is the Khajuraho Temple. Flowers are commonly used as offerings in Hindu rituals and ceremonies. Floral paintings can serve as a reminder of the importance of these offerings in connecting with the divine. Depictions of deities adorned with flower garlands or holding specific flowers emphasize the significance of floral offerings in worship. Found in miniature and manuscript paintings. Flora paintings often depict scenes from Hindu mythology and epic tales like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. These narratives frequently involve interactions with plants and flowers, and the paintings help convey the stories to a wider audience, fostering a deeper understanding of Hindu mythology. Hinduism places a strong emphasis on meditation and spiritual contemplation. Floral paintings with intricate patterns and vibrant colors can serve as objects of meditation, helping individuals connect with the divine and attain a

sense of inner peace and harmony. Hinduism recognizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and nature. Floral paintings celebrate the beauty and diversity of the natural world, reinforcing the idea that the divine can be found in all aspects of creation, including plants and flowers. Yantras and mandalas are geometric designs often used in Hinduism for meditation and as aids in spiritual practice. These designs often incorporate floral patterns, each symbolizing different aspects of the divine. Creating or meditating upon these intricate floral patterns is believed to bring spiritual insight and transformation. Water mixed with various flowers is used for ritual purification in Hinduism. The flowers represent the purity and essence of nature. Flora paintings can serve as a visual reminder of the role of flowers in purification rituals. Flora painting in Hinduism plays a multifaceted role in conveying symbolism, enhancing the aesthetics of sacred spaces, facilitating rituals and offerings, and deepening the connection between individuals and the divine. It is an integral part of the visual language of Hindu religious and cultural expression, contributing to the rich religious tradition of art and spirituality. [Rehman \(2016\)](#)

4.3. BUDDHISM

Flora's painting holds importance in Buddhism for several reasons, encompassing both symbolic and practical aspects. In Buddhism, various plants and flowers are imbued with spiritual and symbolic significance. For example, the lotus flower is a central symbol in Buddhism, representing purity, enlightenment, and the potential for spiritual growth. Depictions of lotus flowers in Buddhist art convey these profound spiritual messages to practitioners. According to Buddhist tradition, Siddhartha Gautama, who later became the Buddha, attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, a fig tree. Paintings and depictions of the Bodhi tree are important in Buddhist art as they symbolize the place of the Buddha's awakening and the path to enlightenment. Flowers, including lotus blossoms, are commonly used as offerings in Buddhist rituals and ceremonies. They symbolize devotion, purity, and the impermanence of life, as flowers eventually wither. Flora paintings can serve as a visual reminder of the significance of floral offerings in Buddhist practice. Mandalas, intricate geometric designs used for meditation and spiritual practice in Buddhism, often incorporate floral patterns and motifs. These mandalas serve as tools for concentration and contemplation, helping practitioners achieve inner peace and enlightenment. In Tibetan Buddhism, *tangka* paintings are highly detailed and often depict religious themes, including deities, bodhisattvas, and sacred landscapes. Flora, such as trees and flowers, are often included in these paintings to create lush and symbolic backgrounds that contribute to the overall spiritual message. Buddhist temples and monasteries are adorned with floral motifs and paintings. These decorations enhance the beauty and sanctity of the sacred spaces, creating an environment conducive to meditation and prayer. A big example of which we get to see in temples like Ajanta and Ellora. Ancient Buddhist texts often contain valuable knowledge about medicinal plants and herbs. This knowledge was sometimes preserved in paintings and illustrations, making it accessible to monks and practitioners who needed it for healing purposes. Buddhism has spread to various regions and cultures, leading to diverse expressions of Buddhist art. Flora painting in Buddhist art can vary significantly across different Buddhist traditions and geographic regions, reflecting the local culture and environment. Depictions of wilting flowers or floral decay in art can be a contemplative reminder of these teachings. Flora painting in Buddhism serves both practical and spiritual purposes. It communicates essential Buddhist concepts, enhances the aesthetics of sacred spaces, aids in meditation and contemplation, and helps convey the profound

messages of the Buddha's teachings. Buddhism reinforces its spiritual values through flora in art and provides a rich and meaningful experience to art followers and lovers. [Sariya \(2022\)](#)

4.4. JAINISM

Flora's painting plays a significant role in Jainism, a religion emphasizing non-violence, spirituality, and a deep reverence for all living beings. The importance of flora painting in Jainism is multifaceted and is chained to the religion's core principles and practices. Jainism strongly emphasizes non-violence (ahimsa), which extends to all living beings, including plants. Flora paintings often reflect this principle by depicting plants and flowers in a way that conveys their sanctity and the importance of preserving all life forms. In Jain rituals and ceremonies, flowers and floral decorations are commonly used as offerings to deities and Tirthankaras (spiritual teachers). Flora paintings can serve as a visual reminder of the significance of these offerings in Jain practice, reinforcing the concept of devotion and reverence. Jain temples are known for their intricate and beautiful architecture, which often incorporates floral motifs. We can see all these in the Jain temple of Dilwara and in caves number 30 to 34 of Ellora. Flora paintings and sculptures adorn these sacred spaces, enhancing their aesthetic appeal and creating an atmosphere of reverence and tranquility for worshipers. Jainism promotes environmental consciousness and sustainable living. Flora paintings can raise awareness about the importance of preserving natural resources and the need to practice ahimsa towards all living beings, including plants. Jainism has a rich tradition of manuscripts and literature, and many of these texts contain detailed illustrations of plants and trees. These illustrations serve as botanical records and expressions of the Jain worldview, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life. Jains follow a strict vegetarian diet to avoid harm to animals, and this diet often includes a variety of plant-based foods. Flora paintings can be found in cookbooks and culinary manuscripts, showcasing the diversity of ingredients used in Jain cuisine. Jain art often features Tirthankara images and depictions of Jain cosmology, including the Kalpavriksha (a wish-fulfilling tree). These artistic representations of flora are integral to Jain iconography and reinforce the spiritual and ethical values of the religion. Jainism encourages meditation and spiritual reflection. The intricate and harmonious designs of flora paintings can serve as objects of meditation, helping practitioners connect with the teachings of Jainism and attain inner peace. Jain rituals often involve the use of water mixed with various flowers for purification purposes. The presence of flora paintings in temples and sacred spaces underscores the role of floral elements in these rituals. In Jainism, flora painting aligns with the central principles of non-violence, compassion, and spiritual growth. It serves as a visual representation of these values and helps practitioners deepen their connection with the natural world while adhering to the core tenets of the faith.

4.5. ISLAMIC ART

Flora painting in Islamic art holds a unique and multifaceted significance within the context of the Islamic tradition. While Islamic art is generally characterized by its avoidance of figurative representations, it does incorporate flora, including floral motifs, plant-based ornamentation, and depictions of gardens. Islamic art tends to avoid direct representation of living creatures, including humans and animals, due to religious beliefs that discourage the creation of images that could be idolized. Instead, flora painting and floral motifs serve as a form of abstraction, allowing

artists to convey the beauty and diversity of the natural world without directly representing living beings. In Islamic tradition, gardens are often associated with Paradise (Jannah). The Quran describes Paradise as a place filled with lush gardens and flowing rivers. Flora painting in Islamic art can represent the idealized concept of Paradise and serve as a visual reminder of the rewards awaiting the faithful. Floral motifs, such as intricate geometric patterns and arabesques, are extensively used in Islamic architectural ornamentation. These motifs are found in mosques, palaces, and other Islamic buildings, enhancing their aesthetic appeal and creating a harmonious and peaceful environment. Many Islamic designs incorporate geometric patterns intertwined with floral elements. These patterns are not only decorative but also have deeper symbolic meanings, reflecting the order and unity of the cosmos and the divine presence. The most vivid examples of this can be seen in the Taj Mahal, Red Fort, Humayun's Tomb, Jama Masjid, Diwan-e-Aam, Diwan-e-Khas, and many other places. In Islamic calligraphy and illuminated manuscripts, flora and botanical motifs are often used to decorate borders and frames around the text. This embellishment adds beauty to religious texts, making them more visually engaging. Which are mostly found in Mughal miniature paintings during the times of Akbar and Jahangir. Islamic gardens, known for their precise geometry and meticulous design, often feature an abundance of flora. These gardens are designed to provide a peaceful and contemplative space, and flora painting in Islamic art can reflect the beauty and serenity of these gardens. In the Islamic world, rulers and elites have historically commissioned lavish manuscripts, textiles, and other artworks featuring flora motifs. These works often served as expressions of wealth, power, and cultural and artistic refinement. Islamic art has been influenced by various cultures and regions, and floral painting has been a part of this exchange. Elements of flora from different parts of the Islamic world, such as Persian miniatures or Mughal art, have contributed to the rich diversity of Islamic artistic expressions. In Sufi art and poetry, flora can carry spiritual and mystical symbolism. For example, the rose may symbolize divine love, and flora paintings can be used to illustrate these metaphysical concepts. Flora painting in Islamic art serves as a means of artistic expression that adheres to the principles of Islamic art while allowing for the celebration of nature's beauty and the creation of harmonious and spiritually significant environments. It showcases the artistic ingenuity of Islamic cultures while remaining rooted in the religious and cultural traditions of the Islamic world. [Sariya \(2023\)](#)

5. CONCLUSION

Flora painting is an important part of the cultural, religious and creative heritage of Indian art. It represents India's strong connection with the natural environment and serves as a visual language expressing its significance, beauty and spirituality. Flora painting in Indian art is reflected in Hindu mythology and scriptures for its unique symbolic and religious value. Flora painting has a variety of functions in Hinduism, including expressing symbolism, improving the aesthetics of sacred areas, enabling rituals and sacrifices, and developing a connection between humans and the divine. In Buddhism, flora painting has both utilitarian and spiritual goals. It communicates fundamental Buddhist principles, improves the aesthetics of sacred places, aids meditation and contemplation, and facilitates the transmission of the deeper themes of the Buddha's teachings. Buddhism emphasizes its spiritual ideals through flora in art, which provides practitioners and art lovers with a rich and meaningful experience. Flora painting matches the core ideals of Jainism, which are non-violence, compassion, and spiritual progress. It serves as a visual

illustration of these principles and demonstrates a deep connection with the natural world while staying true to the essential beliefs of the faith. Botanical painting in Islamic art is a form of artistic expression that follows Islamic art ideals while allowing for personal expression. The significance of flowers in Indian culture is not limited to paintings. Flowers are also used in various religious ceremonies and rituals. Through botanical paintings, artists express a sense of harmony and balance that is at the core of Indian philosophy. The juxtaposition of vibrant colors and serene landscapes creates a sense of peace and unity with the universe, inviting the viewer to immerse themselves in the beauty of the natural world. Botanical paintings in Indian art and mythology transcend time and space.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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