

## The Study of Changing Nature of Horse Imagery in Indian Visual Art



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### Abstract

The study explores the development of the representation of horse forms in Indian visual art and tracks its progress from ancient to contemporary times. Horses are a permanent symbol of Indian culture and are depicted in various forms and styles that reflect the dynamic socio-political, religious and cultural landscapes. This study examined the various mediums of art, including ancient sculptures, traditional paintings and modern art, and highlighted how horses' representations adapted to various artistic movements and historical contexts. The study also examined the symbolic and cultural meaning of horse images and analysed how these elements changed over time. Through a comprehensive analysis, this paper aims to provide a more in-depth understanding of the complex relationship between Indian visual traditions of art, culture and symbolism. The present research paper compares the representation of horse form in Indian art.

**Key words :** - Changing Nature, Horse Imagery, Indian Visual Art

### Research Paper

This research paper employs a qualitative research methodology, focusing on the analysis of Key artworks of Horses depiction related to the Significant Developments of Ancient Indian art.

#### Horse Depictions and Representative Paintings and Sculptures in Indian Art

Indian art has a very rich artistic heritage. Over the course of time, many cultures have risen and fallen, but throughout this cycle, the cultures of different eras have left their footprints in Indian history through the medium of art. The Indian art tradition has evolved from these works of art. Animal images have been an integral part of the artworks created by humans in all these periods, right from prehistoric times, while in modern contemporary art, animal images have been creatively used in all periods. Therefore, a comparative study of Horse images of different periods is useful while studying Indian art.

#### Horse Depictions in pre historic Art

Bhimbetka Rock Shelter is a UNESCO World Heritage

Site located in Madhya Pradesh, India. There are old cave paintings, including the famous horse depiction here, 561 horses and all from historical times. 510 of them. It is estimated that it is between 10,000 and 15,000 years old and is one of the oldest known examples of Indian art. Horses are considered to be important subjects in cave paintings, possibly representing strength, power, or mobility. Bhimbetka cave horse painting is an ancient Indian art ("प्रागैतिहासिक कला, भारतातील (Prehistoric Art in India)," 2021)



Figure 1 Soldiers and horse rider Bhimbetka.

## Horse Depictions in Hindu Mythology. Uchchaihshravas



Figure 2 Lord Surya in a chariot drawn by Uchchaihshravas,

**Introduction**—Uchchaihshravas is a majestic white horse with seven heads, considered one of the most magnificent creatures in Hindu mythology. It is said to have the power to transport its rider to any realm, making it a highly coveted for gods and demons alike.

**Origin**—According to Hindu mythology, Uchchaihshravas emerged from the ocean of milk during the Samudra Manthan, a churning process undertaken by the gods and demons to produce the nectar of immortality. The horse was said to be so magnificent that it was chosen for the chariot of the god Indra, king of the gods. Uchchaihshravas is described as a seven-headed horse with unparalleled strength and speed. Its beauty and majesty are said to be unmatched, making it a symbol of royalty and power.

**Role in Hindu mythology**—Uchchaihshravas plays a significant role in various Hindu myths, representing divine power, strength, and beauty. Its legend has captivated the imagination of people for centuries, inspiring artistic depictions and literary works ([Indian Care of Horses]. Shalihotra Samhita [Encyclopedia of the Physician Shalihotra]. ... - Antiquariat INLIBRIS Gilhofer Nfg., n.d.)

### Horse Depictions in Buddhist Mythology

Buddhism is a significant aspect of Buddhist art and symbolism.

**Symbolism**—Horses represent strength, courage, and loyalty in Buddhist mythology. They are associated with the wind element, symbolizing swiftness and speed.



Figure 3 Renunciation or Mahabhinishkramana.

Horses are often depicted in Buddhist art as companions to important figures, such as:

- The Four Heavenly Kings (Lokapalas)
- The Bodhisattva of Compassion (Avalokiteshvara)
- The Guardian of the North (Vaisravana)
- They are typically shown in dynamic poses, emphasizing their strength and energy. (“बौद्ध कला,” 2019)

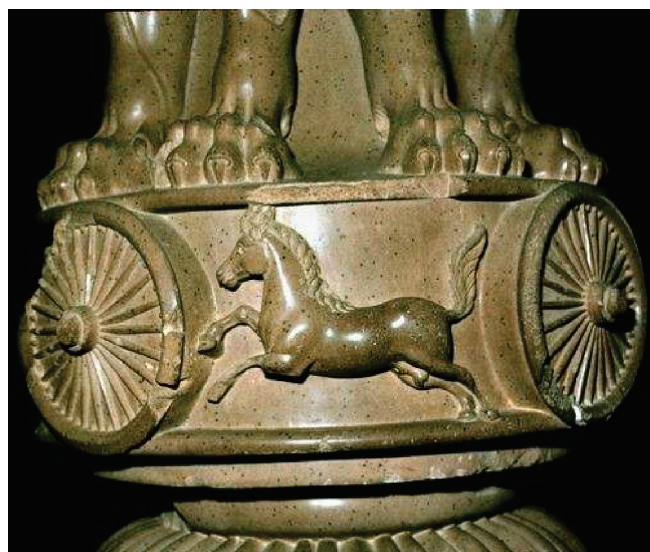


Figure 4 details of lion capital Sarnath.

### Horse Depictions in Indian Miniature Painting

Horse depictions in miniature paintings are a common feature in various Indian art styles, particularly in Rajput and Mughal miniature paintings. These paintings often showcased horses as symbols of power, strength, and nobility. Here are some interesting aspects of horse depictions in miniature paintings.





Figure 5 (n.d.) Two ladies on horseback hunting wild boar.

Realistic and detailed representations: Artists rendered horses with remarkable attention to detail, capturing their anatomy, movements, and emotions. Decorative elements: Horses were often adorned with intricate saddles, bridles, and ornate trappings, reflecting the owner's wealth and status. Dynamic compositions: Horses were depicted in various poses, such as galloping, prancing, or standing, adding a sense of energy and movement to the paintings. Symbolism: Horses represented royal power, courage, and loyalty, and were often associated with mythological and legendary figures. (Rajput Painting at Bundi and Kota, 2024)

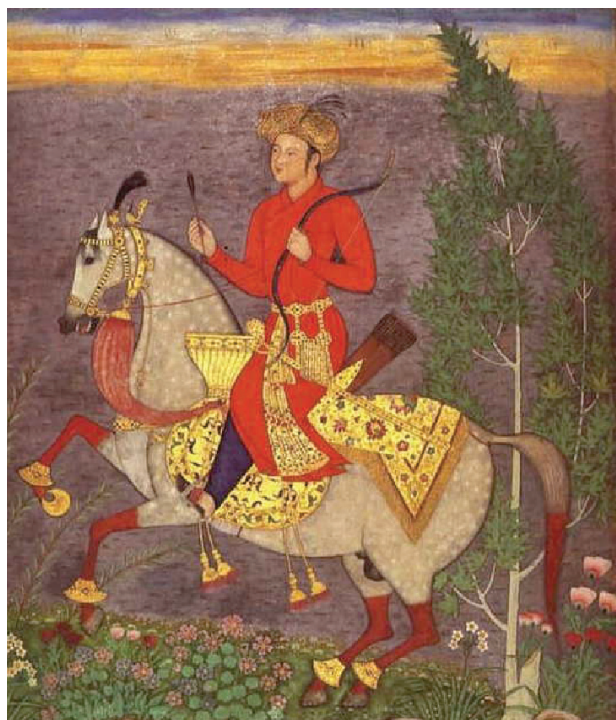


Figure 6 A prince hawking.

## Company Painting

In the late 1700s, British East India Company expanded to India, and many of its employees moved from England to India, establishing a new life. As they travelled across the country, they encountered unusual plants and animals, beautiful ancient monuments and new exotic people, and wanted to capture these images to send them home. Historical Context British colonial period: Emerged during the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, catering to European patrons. East India Company: Many Company Style paintings were created for employees of the East India Company. Cultural exchange: Reflects the cultural exchange and influences between Indian and European artistic traditions. travellers had to hire Indian painters to do the work. The work soft he se artists, in European styles and palettes, are collectively known as "company paintings" (Sardar, n.d.) Characteristics: Hybrid style: Blend of Indian and European artistic traditions. Realistic depictions: Detailed, realistic representations of everyday life, landscapes, and flora/fauna. Medium of paintings Water color or gouache: Typically executed in water color or gouache on paper or ivory. subjects of company paintings is Indian life and culture: Scenes of everyday life, festivals, and rituals. Landscapes and architecture: Depictions of Indian monuments, forts, and landscapes. (Sardar, n.d.)



Figure 7. An archer riding a composite horse.

This company painting depicts a archer riding a horse made of seven women's bodies and a demon-like figure. One woman plays a horn, another drum, another guitar-like instrument and another finger drum, while one woman sings and the other two women sit silently. From 1820 to 1830, there was a trend in Delhi for composite paintings of this type. The "company paintings" were

made by Indian artists for Europeans living and working in the subcontinent of India, especially the British employees of the East India Company. They represent a fusion of traditional Indian art styles and conventions and technical features borrowed from Western art. Some of the company's paintings are specially ordered, while others are almost in large numbers and can be purchased at bazaars.

### Horses Paintings in Indian modern art

Horses have been a significant subject in Indian modern painting, symbolizing power, strength, and freedom. Many Indian artists. M.F. Husain, F.N. Souza, Souza, Ganesh Pyne, Jogen Chowdhury and others have depicted horses in their Paintings, often blending traditional and contemporary styles. Here are some notable examples:

#### Jamini Roy

Jamini Roy was another artist from the generation whose oeuvre frequently featured horses. Highly influenced by the folk traditions of India and especially Bengal, he painted horses that were inspired by terracotta horse sculpture from his native region of Bankura. One of such work is a creation from Circa 1950. Complementing the minimalist form with the vibrant red background and presence of other traditionally bold colours like green and yellow, the artist has perfectly captured the essence of the horse as a traditional motif in Indian art.



Figure 8 Untitled, Jamini Roy, Circa 1950,

#### M.F. Husain

Indian artist M.F. Husain was born in Pandharpur, Maharashtra state, on September 17, 1915, He was renowned for creating narrative paintings in a modified Cubist style that were bright and vividly colored. Known for his bold and vibrant paintings, Husain often featured horses in his painting, showcasing their dynamic movement and energy. Husain's horses that are now recognised globally as his signature art. He was among the most renowned and well-known Indian artists of the 20th century on a global scale.



Figure 9 Untitled (Horses) Maqbool Fida Husain 1913 – 2011

Four horses are shown screaming and trying to escape, and their elegant moves show immense power, proof of Husain's ability to portray the sense of movement through his lines.

**Symbolism:** Horses symbolize strength, power, freedom, and the human spirit in Husain's work.

#### Style and Technique

**Dynamic compositions:** Husain's horse paintings feature dynamic compositions that convey energy and movement.

**Vibrant colors:** He used vibrant, bold colors to capture the spirit and majesty of the horses. **Expressionist brushstrokes:** Husain's brushstrokes were expressive and gestural, adding to the sense of energy and movement.

#### Significance and Legacy

**Indian modern art:** Husain's horse paintings are considered a cornerstone of Indian modern art. His artwork has been exhibited globally, earning him international recognition and acclaim. Husain's innovative style and themes have inspired generations of Indian and international artists.

M.F. Husain's horse paintings continue to captivate audiences worldwide with their unique blend of Indian



mythology, modernist style, and timeless symbolism. (Chandra, 2012)

## Conclusion

The depiction of horses in Indian art is a common motif, symbolizing power, strength, and grace. In various forms of Indian art, horses are often depicted in an imaginary or stylized manner, rather than in realistic terms. Here are some conclusions that can be drawn about the depiction of horses in Indian art.

Horses are often depicted with exaggerated features, such as enlarged eyes, muscular bodies, and dynamic movements, to convey a sense of energy and power.

In Indian mythology, horses are associated with gods and goddesses, such as Hayagriva (the horse-headed avatar of Vishnu) and Kalki (the tenth avatar of Vishnu, who rides a white horse). This mythological significance is reflected in their depiction in art.

The depiction of horses in Indian art also varies across different regions and styles, such as the Mughal miniature paintings, Rajput paintings, and South Indian bronze sculptures.

The imaginary depiction of horses in Indian art allows artists to convey emotions, ideas, and spiritual concepts, rather than simply representing physical reality.

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