

# Symbol of wisdom in art of Independent India : The Deer

Lakhwinder Singh<sup>1</sup>, Manpreet Kaur<sup>2</sup>

Research Scholar (PhD Fine Arts), Desh Bhagat University, Mandi Gobindgarh , Punjab.

## Abstract

In today's time we are aware of the condition and direction of modern art. If we talk about modern art, it often challenges traditional norms and experiments with new materials , techniques, and forms. These art movements focus on personal expression, exploring a wide range of emotions and ideas. Modern art encompasses a variety of styles, cultures and perspectives, reflecting a globalizing world. Conceptual art places a strong emphasis on ideas and concept, sometimes giving priority over traditional aesthetics which is also essential. Much contemporary art often engages with current social and cultural issues, providing commentary and critique. Many contemporary artists mix a variety of artistic disciplines. When an ordinary person thinks out of the box, he becomes God's precious gem, who changes the world with just one thought. Their imaginary and mysterious creations force every person to think. Every artist has a different approach towards art. An artist's style is called art, as for example I've chosen the deer which has been indifferent art styles from the beginning till now.

**Keywords:** Deer, imagination, cultural, modern art, contemporary art, print, mythology

## Introduction

Art is a lake of fresh water in which man's thirst and desire to understand art is fulfilled. Because imagination completes the artist's creation. It makes even the invisible object a part of the earth. Beautiful subjects are created from imagination. To understand the definition of art, the artist has to jump into life, see the mental problems of the people, their social structure religious and political understanding the environment in which they are living, with a third eye. When the artist sees the reality from the point of view of the people, he realizes the difference between his creation and the creation of nature. The desire to imitate nature and the intense desire to create his own world puts him at the point of creation and the artist praises nature.

“Life is beautiful, learn to live,  
Learn to drink the juice it gives.  
If God wishes, you’ll reach your aim,  
Learn to achieve and stake your claim.  
Many difficulties will block the way,  
Learn to cross them with head held high.  
Life is beautiful, learn to live.” ...

There are many such small and big things in the natural world. They have their own special qualities, their own family, and live in their own world. Unity is what keeps their identity intact. If a big animal attacks their family they face it together, They face many small and big difficulties along with their

family. So out of these animals I have made a deer my friend who has filled me with a lot of confidence, he keeps helping me from time to time, what do you think whether he really comes and helps me or not. I have included him in my work with my sketch drawings. The first time I saw him in the forest near my house, his behavior impressed me a lot and his colors, textures, different shapes, his rhythmic gait, beautiful eyes and small horns created his unique identity in my heart. I started making it in my print making style and kept experimenting with new materials, techniques and forms. From time to time, his unique shape keeps impressing me.

### Study of literature

In Indian art the deer is often considered a symbol of wisdom. This symbolism is derived from various sources including Hindu mythology and Buddhism. The deer has a special place in art and has been depicted in every style of art.

### Deer in Jataka tales

In Hindu mythology, the "Upanishads" (texts) are found in that the goddess Saraswati takes the form of a red deer named Rohit. Saraswati is the goddess of learning, in Buddhist art, the deer symbolizes the first teachings of the Buddha, <sup>1</sup>

The graceful and gentle nature of the deer is also seen as a representation of calm and intelligent behavior. The painting style and the preference of certain colors vary according to the period in which the manuscript was created. While in 18th-century paintings deer usually appear static, a century later they are often shown in motion. <sup>2</sup>

According to mythological texts, black deer were used in the chariots of Lord Krishna. In Sanskrit texts, black deer are called "Krishna Mrig" (Black Deer). They are also considered the vehicle of Vayu Devta and Chandra Devta. In Rajasthan, a popular goddess Karni Mata is believed to be the protector of black deer. <sup>3</sup>

The deer is one of the symbols associated with Shiva. A The deer is shown balanced on the two middle fingers of Shiva's left hand in the depiction. The deer is also found in his Kalyana-murti form, a Kalighat painting. (print-1) <sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that symbolism in Indian art may vary across different regions and time periods, but the association of deer with wisdom is a recurring symbol. There are nine species of deer found in India. These include the hangul (Kashmir stag), thamin (brow-antlered deer), barasingha (swamp deer), sambar, chital (spotted deer), para (hog deer), kakar (muntjac), kastura (musk deer) and pisura. <sup>5</sup>

A depiction of the Buddha being reborn as a deer is in one of the Jataka Tales. This story has many incarnations and names: e.g. "The Story of Ruru Deer", which is kept in Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. Apart from this there is another story from China.

"The Golden Deer Jataka tales are stories of Buddha's previous lives when he was a bodhisattva. This story, sometimes also called "The Golden Deer" or "Ruru Deer" <sup>6</sup>

An animated film has been made on this, "A Deer of Nine Colors" is a 1981 Chinese animated film, produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio. It is also called "Nine Colored Deer".

The golden deer plays an important role in the epic Ramayana. In the illustration, during the exile, Rama's wife Sita sees a golden deer and asks Rama and Lakshmana to fetch it for her. The deer is actually a demon named Maricha. Maricha assumes this form to lure Rama and Lakshmana away from Sita so that his nephew Ravana could abduct her. <sup>7</sup> (Print -2)

Great sage Jadbharata, an incarnation of Lord Brahma, took the form of a deer in his previous life and lived a great life. Once the great sage Kindama took the form of a deer and tried to mate with a female deer. At that time, the mighty king Pandu accidentally killed him by shooting an arrow. The great queen Shakuntala, wife of Dushyanta, loved deers and fed them grass, fruits and vegetables and they were nurtured by sage Kanva in the forest. <sup>8</sup>

### In the caves Deer

“The earliest mention of deer is found in the rock shelters and caves of Bhimbetka where there are a large number of paintings. One rock, popularly called the "Zoo Rock", depicts barasingha (swamp deer), bison and deer. The paintings on another rock depict a deer and the Sun. <sup>9</sup>

India is one of the richest centres of rock art in the world. While rock paintings depict about two dozen species of wild animals, the etched paintings mainly depict cattle and other domestic animals. Among the wild animals, the deer family has been the most popular. <sup>10</sup>

The best example of this Even in Ajanta Caves, the depiction of a deer at the foot of the Buddha statue shows his influence on the deer of this time. <sup>11</sup>

### Deer in stone pose

“Some bone tools were also seen in Mohenjodaro, Chanhudaro and Lothal. In which the image of a deer is carved. The first things found from the excavations of Harappa and Mohenjodaro were small stone coins on which beautiful pictures of animals were engraved, in which there is a deer on the top left. Horn-like features were also included <sup>7</sup>, which are said to resemble deer <sup>12</sup>

### Deer in dramatic art

In India, many Buddhist groups perform deer dances. Most of the groups living in the eastern Himalayas perform these dances using grotesque wooden masks with horns. Deer dances are also found in the central Himalayan region. Hiran-Chital (Spotted Deer) is a folk dance performed on Durga-Ashtami in the Hindu month of **Bhadrapad (August-September)** in the Askot area of District **Pithoragarh, Uttar Pradesh**. Five male members of the village perform the gait and movements of the Chital. <sup>13</sup>

### Deer in palm leaf manuscript

In a palm-leaf manuscript depicting the Subahu-Katha dated to 1288 CE, the Jain monk Baladeva is shown surrounded by animals including a pair of black deer. (Print -3)

**Deer** have been found not only in **Thai manuscript** illustrations, but also as gold-on-lacquer decorations on manuscript covers and manuscript chests.

### Deer in miniatures

During the time of the great Mughal Akbar, 144 illustrations were prepared by 49 artists for the Baburnama written by Babur himself between 1528-30. Various schools of Rajasthani painting have many masterpieces depicting **deer-hunting scenes**. <sup>16</sup> (Print -4)

“**The nilgai**, popularly known as the blue bull, is a type of **antelope** found in central and northern India and eastern Pakistan. This study was probably painted by **Mansur** after he saw the animal in the zoological garden of **Jahangir** (1605-27). <sup>17</sup>

**Mughals** Ragamala Pictures **Miyan Ki Todi** The deer and the antelope are depicted along with Todi **Ragini** and **Pancham Raga**. Painting by Ragini Todi, described as a second generation master after **Nainsukh**, 1825-30. Which is displayed in Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh.<sup>18</sup> Kangra miniatures of the Pahari school made their mark in the 18th century. And these had an enamel-like shine. (Print -18) Landscapes, **deer**, The lush greenery of waterfalls and streams were recurring images on the miniatures.<sup>20</sup>

### Deer in tribal art

Tribal painting originated from home decoration. It is seen as a means of warding off evil spirits.

**The Gond people** used to apply clay paste on the floors, doors and walls of their houses and paint **deer pictures**. The Parham's, a small sub-group of **the Gond tribal community** in the Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh, are known for their visual creativity.<sup>21</sup>

**Warli painting**, named after the Warli tribe, is a very basic art form compared to the vibrant **Madhubani** or **Pithora paintings**, but also depicts hunting, **deer**, They also depict social life with human figures engaged in dancing, sowing and harvesting.<sup>22</sup>

### Significance of deer in post-independence art

India witnessed a growing demand for independence and also, A group of artists known as the '**Bengal School**' was formed who wanted to create a unique Indian art. These artists opposed Western academicism, Roy was trained in Western academic painting styles and, under the influence of the Bengal School, set out on his own artistic path around 1925. Some of these artists emerged, who worked on the deer<sup>23</sup>

"**Jamini Roy** was one of the earliest and most important modernists in Indian art. With exquisite control of the brush, he created deer with fluid, calligraphic lines Jamini Roy captured the qualities that are part of native folk painting and recombined them with his own qualities. He combined the minimal brush strokes of the **Kalighat style with elements of the tribal art of Bengal**. If we think about tribal art, the importance of deer increases in it, which has been presented very beautifully by **Jamini Roy** an example of is that a deer in the Forest (Ramayana) - Jamini Roy - Bengal Art Painting<sup>24</sup>

"Shri Nandlal Bose was one of the prominent disciples of Shri Abanindranath Tagore. He contributed a lot to the renaissance movement of Indian art. But in impressionist art we see our soul through the external world. Considering such a point of view "Nandlal Bose Indian Watercolor Village scene of a woman sitting with a **black deer** has been shown.<sup>25</sup>

Raja Ravi Varma is the best example of the blend of modern painting with pure Indian sensibility and iconography. In particular, he was known for inexpensive lithographs of his paintings. He painted many copies of his works and this demand led to the suggestion of printing his paintings as oleographs. He brought his paintings to the masses and a deer can be seen as recurring element in his paintings, **Shakuntala Letter Writing** is an 1876 painting by Raja Ravi Varma. The work depicts Shakuntala lying on the grass, writing a letter to her lover Dushyanta. At the back there is a deer standing and looking at her gracefully. Ravi Varma received praise when this work was presented at the Madras Fine Arts Exhibition of 1876.<sup>26</sup>

### Cultural representations of Deer

The significance of the deer in print art, especially in different cultural contexts, is multifaceted. As the role and importance of deer not only limits to India but it extends all over the world and their

cultures. From Asian continent to western and eastern continents the Deer plays its symbolism as follows, Deer often symbolize grace, beauty, peace, and gentleness. They are also seen as messengers or mediators between the earthly and spiritual realms.

As in Japanese art, In Shinto religion, deer are considered messengers of the gods. They often appear in traditional Japanese prints, such as Ukiyo-e.

In the European art Deer are often depicted in medieval and Renaissance art, symbolizing purity and innocence. In some contexts, they are associated with Christ or the saints.

Also in Native American Art Deer are seen as totem animals, representing sensitivity, intuition, and natural beauty.

Artists often use deer to highlight the beauty and tranquility of nature, emphasizing their beauty and the peacefulness of the woods.

Deer appear in many myths and legends around the world, often reflecting qualities such as agility, renewal, and a connection to nature. They have mythological and folklore subjects and themes relating to them.

These varied significances make deer a popular subject in print art, allowing artists to convey a variety of emotions and messages through their work.

### **The importance of deer in my works**

Most of my work is based on nature. Nature is the only thing that helps us to move forward and live. I believe deer as a special element of the nature and I have tried to present its form and appearance. Most of all, I paid attention to her eyes which reflect their own form. In ancient times and even today, people have given many examples of their eyes. They call the female eyes as Naina or Mriganaini. Without naming them, they testify to the beauty of these deer. The best example of this **Vishnudharmottar Purana is a sub-Purana**. In which **Vedvyas** has described the beauty of **Urvashi** in which he has called her eyes like **those of a doe**. Nain is addressed as Nain in most Indian miniature paintings. The attention of any animal or human being first goes towards the eyes. It is the eyes that make a person recognizable. Apart from this, there is another beauty inside the deer, that is the musk inside them, their fragrance can remain intact in their different shapes. In search of this fragrance, the deer roams itself in the whole forest and it does not pay attention to its inner fragrance. Human beings also have that quality and fragrance which they are always searching for. On not getting what they want again and again, they get disheartened and then do not make any effort in life and some people even decide to end their life but you must have liked one thing about animals that they can never end their life on their own. However much hungry it is or doesn't matter how much sad it is but it always keeps fighting for his life. But on the other hand, we human send their life just because of a sour feeling. Some great man has said, "Life is a work, Life is the name of doing work and death is the final rest. That is why never stop doing your work because after death you will go to the ultimate rest anyway, so before that why are you stopping your work, why are you getting frustrated?" In the same way I have incorporated the shape of the deer with its color, form and size in my **print making**. I have tried my best to get involved in the work. My work about the beauty of nature and deer and the beauty of shapes is like ice cream on the cake and my **printmaking** technique has made these figures and natural objects look more beautifully combined together, in which I have worked with collography technique. I have done this work on **idioms** which are disappearing from our day to day life. We have stopped living life and are stuck in small things. Idioms teach us how to live, there is a big meaning hidden in these small idioms. Our elders used to



inspire us to move ahead before difficulties came our way. They used to explain things to us through idioms and we had a lot of fun solving these idioms. In these works of mine, I have made a small effort to remember those idioms.

## Conclusion

The context of regionalism in Indian painting is multifaceted, reflecting the diverse cultural, social and historical landscapes of different regions. Artists often draw inspiration from their surroundings, local traditions and unique cultural identities, contributing to the rich tapestry of Indian art. Regionalism in Indian painting allows for a nuanced exploration of different themes, styles and techniques, promoting a deeper understanding of the country's cultural mosaic. The deer holds significant symbolic and artistic value in Indian art, both in historical and contemporary contexts. Here are some key aspects of the deer's contribution. The deer is a prominent symbol in Buddhism, representing gentleness, harmony, and compassion. The Deer Park at Sarnath is where Buddha gave his first sermon, often depicted with deer in Buddhist art. The deer is associated with various deities and myths. Lord Krishna is sometimes depicted with a deer, symbolizing grace and beauty. In the Ramayana, the golden deer plays a crucial role in the storyline. Deer are also present in Jain art and symbolism, representing non-violence and the peaceful nature of the Jain path. Many Indian temples feature intricate carvings and sculptures of deer. These are often found in friezes and panels, illustrating religious narratives and nature. Ancient cave paintings, such as those in Bhimbetka, often depict deer, showcasing their importance in the daily life and spirituality of early inhabitants. Deer are frequently seen in miniature paintings from the Mughal and Rajput periods, symbolizing elegance and the beauty of the natural world. These paintings often depict courtly scenes, hunts, and nature. In various tribal art forms, such as Gond and Warli paintings, deer are common motifs, representing the interconnectedness of life and nature. Contemporary Indian artists continue to draw inspiration from traditional depictions of deer, integrating them into modern contexts and new artistic expressions. The presence of the deer in Indian art across various mediums and periods underscores its enduring symbolic importance and aesthetic appeal.

While creating a deer according to market trends may increase its commercial appeal, it is not necessarily the case for every artist. Balancing personal expression with market demands depends on your goals and values as an artist.

## Impression-1



("God Shiva is in the form of Bichandi or Bhikshatan (begging). Lord is in white skin and naked but wearing one red lion cloth, ornaments and a garland of skulls. He has four arms, he hold Trident and blood bowl in his two hands and the other hands are holding Drum and deer. His hair has a crown of flames. A figure in yellow skin in front of lord, has kept a bowl of eyes on his head.")

### Impression -2



( Valmiki of Ramayana From Folio (The Freer Ramayana, Vol. 1, Folio 128; recto:Text; Verse: Ram in the pursuit of Demon **Maricha**the ones who has taken the form of a Golden Deer 1597-1605 Fazal, ( Indian, Mughal) Dynasty Paper But Opaque Water color, ink And Sleep H : 26.3 W : 13.8 cm Northern India Charles Lang Freer Of Gift F1907.271.128)

### Impression -3



(1288 of E. Subahu - The Story on Palm leaves Manuscript I, Jain Muni Baldev is shown surrounded by a pair of black deer including animals.)

#### Impression -4



(This work of mine reflects modern times which promotes a deeper understanding of the cultural mosaic of our country. This work of mine was selected as “**Aankhon Ka Tara**” in Lalit Kala Academy, Delhi in 2022.)

#### Impression -5



(In the times of Great mughal king Akabar, 49 artists created 144 artworks for the Barburnama, written by Barbur himself during 1528-30. In Rajasthani schools of Art there are various excellent works depicting hunting scenes of deer.)



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