

The Theory of Citrasutras in Indian Painting

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Abstract

The study of technical treatises in Indian art has piqued the curiosity of many scholars in recent years. This study proposes a critical re-examination of the core Indian notions of painting as detailed in the Sanskrit treatises known as citrasutras, which are considered to be the foundation of Indian painting. It critically explores the various ways in which the books on the theory of Indian painting have been understood and employed in the study of Indian painting, and it proposes a new approach to reading and understanding their notions through an in-depth and systematic investigation of the texts. To the contrary of prior publications on the subject, it is asserted that the planned use of such texts as a standard of critique generally failed because there was an incorrect understanding of what "text" meant for Indian painters. Using the experiences of painters, who are considered to be a valid source of knowledge for our understanding of the citrasutras, Isabella Nardi develops a novel approach to research in this field. She also develops a new conceptual framework for understanding the interconnections between textual sources and the practise of Indian painting. Nardi's work will be of interest to anyone who are interested in Indian painting or Indian art in general because it fills a critical vacuum in Indian academia.

Keywords: *Citrasutras, Indian Art, Nardi's study etc.*

1. **Introduction** It is the purpose of this research to critically investigate the fundamental concepts behind the philosophy of Indian painting as explained in the Sanskrit works, the citrasutras, and to determine how they differ from one another. It is a Sanskrit word that translates as "treatise on painting," and it is derived from the word "citra-sutra." It is a mixture of two words: citra, which means "picture, sketch, or delineation," and sutra, which means "aphoristic law," or a combination of the two words. They are considered to be an important piece of ancient Sanskrit scientific literature since it explores painting within the context of Indian philosophical thought, according to the researchers. In this study, the term citrasutra is

used to refer to all of the works and sections of literature that deal with the topic of citra in one general sense.

In this paper, I present a thorough investigation into and evaluation of the substance of the citrasutras, as well as an examination into and evaluation of the many ways in which they have been interpreted and applied to the study of Indian painting, and a proposal for a new approach to reading and understanding them. It is now possible to do much of this study because of the enormous number of scholars who are currently translating, commenting on, and interpreting the literature under consideration. These scholars' contributions to the discipline are significant, but their perspectives have some limitations, and their expectations about the various applications of a text prevent us from fully comprehending the true contents and spirit of the citrasutras. An in-depth discussion of the analysis and method of grasping the citrasutras will be provided in this study, which will be presented in an innovative manner. The thesis's primary purpose is to bring together the diverse ideas that have been expressed in a range of different texts. Despite the fact that Shukla (1957) was the first to investigate this methodology, his investigation was cursory and consisted solely of a list of notions. For the purpose of better understanding the concepts of the citrasutras, this study will aim to gather them all together, analyse them, and compare them with other concepts that have previously been excluded from other works, such as those of talamana and iconography. This will need, first and foremost, overcoming one of the most major limitations of existing research, namely the belief that ideas from sculpture and other linked arts are distinct from theories of Indian painting, which is now held to be incorrect. Along with showing that it is difficult to distinguish clearly between certain painting theories and those of sculpture, this research reveals that these two art forms are sometimes regarded as if they are one and the same when they are discussed in literature. Upon the basis of these findings, researchers propose that the term citra be reinterpreted in light of our present understanding of the term. Despite the fact that the term citra is typically translated as "painting," it is asserted that the texts use it in a more abstract sense as a "mental image," which can be interpreted and realised in a variety of ways in both painting and sculpture.

According to the findings of this study, because the citrasutras present such a diverse variety of different perspectives on Indian painting, the establishment of direct linkages between theory and practise may become rather arbitrary. Rather than being presented as laws that

must be strictly followed, these points of view are presented as suggestions in the writings, as demonstrated by the optative inflection of the verbs that are employed in them, the tone of which does not sound like an order but rather like 'something that should be done.' Despite the fact that they all share the same philosophical outlook on visual representation, these suggestions were formulated by a large number of artists or writers whose identities are neither known nor ultimately knowable; they were written at different times and places, as a result, they contain some differences and contradictions despite the fact that they all share the same philosophical outlook on visual representation; they were written at different times and places, as a result, they contain some differences and contradictions despite the fact that they all share the same philosophical outlook on visual. Despite this, it is evident that these authors are philosophers, articulating highly hypothetical concepts that are difficult to put into practise and are open to personal interpretation, as indicated by the absence of any practical aid for artists throughout the book..... In addition, it is impossible to analyse and evaluate the substance of the citrasutras in their whole from a single point of view since they deal with a variety of subjects, each of which has its own specific aspect, which makes it impossible to do so from a single point of view. In some of the sections, which appear to be hands-on training activities, we are shown how to manufacture plaster and how to prepare colours and brushes, among other things. Additionally, there are a number of other sections with broader conceptual underpinnings, such as describing an ideal male body shape, while the other sections explore or codify a wide range of possibilities, such as different ways in which a figure could be represented, or different kinds of shapes for the depiction of eyes, or a variety of other possibilities. There is no definitive way to trace the origins of the citrasutras, which represent a significant development in the philosophy of traditional Indian painting. Instead, they can be traced back to the beginnings of the genre's organic history, which includes a diverse variety of topics and attributes. These new advances do not represent a rejection of the previous perspectives, but rather an integration of those views into the 'science' of Indian painting.

2. The Discovery of the Citrasūtra

A number of important textual sources, either in their entirety or in fragments, were "discovered," edited, and translated during the first half of the twentieth century. This helped to bring them into the mainstream of scholarly discussion. As true meaning carriers, they

began to have enormous cultural value and to be revered as such. For instance, the *Citrastra* of the *Viudharmottara*, which made its debut on the Indian stage of art history when it was first translated into English in 1924 by Stella Kramrisch, a pioneering historian of Indian art who was also a practical art historian, is a good example of such a text. This art historian from Vienna came to come across this text by chance during her first few days in India in 1919, when she was exploring the country. When Kramrisch was younger, he discovered the *Viudharmottara Pura* in print for the first time. In 1912, it was released by the Venkateshwar Press in Bombay and was compiled by Pandit Madhusudhan and Madhavprasad Sarma, and it piqued his interest. With her English translation of the work, she is credited with bringing it into the discourse of art history and Indology for the first time (Kramrisch 1928 [1924]). Almost a decade passed after this work's publication before another pioneering art historian, A.K. Coomaraswamy, took up the cause of this text, focussing his attention on one of its chapters, *adhyaya* 41, in particular for translation and study (Coomaraswamy 1933, 13–21). *Satya*, *Vaiika*, *Ngara*, and *Mira* are the four types of painting that are discussed in this chapter of the text, which is divided into four sections. According to Coomaraswamy, the first two types of cave paintings belonged to the pictorial heritage of the Ajanta caves and were consequently conserved as a result of their importance. By this time, the interpretation of the *Citrastrata* had piqued the interest of the two most renowned art historians of Indian art, both of whom were instrumental in the establishment of the discipline of art history in the country. In the following decades, it was elevated to a higher position and transformed into an Ur-text for a broad-ranging extrapolation concerning Indian art and aesthetics, which persisted throughout much of the first decade of the twenty-first century and into the twentieth century (Nardi 2006).

Between the release of Coomaraswamy's commentary on the text and the publication of the first critical edition, which was edited by a Sanskritist named Priyabala Shah between 1958 and 1961, there is around a twenty-five-year gap. Incorporating the readings from six new manuscripts into Shah's edition, she established new ground in the field of textual criticism. She did, however, limit her attempts at theorization to the same chapter chosen by Coomaraswami, which dealt with the classification of paintings, which was an unique twist in its own right. She was not the only person to make this observation. Coomaraswamy's metaphysical interpretations of the vocabulary were supported by the edited version of the

manuscript, but she was far too preoccupied with making connections between different types of paintings and different types of architectural styles to pay attention to that aspect of the manuscript. She was far too preoccupied with making connections between different types of paintings and different types of architectural styles. The Citrastra was rediscovered exactly two decades later by an art historian named C. Sivaramamurti, who provided a translation and discussion on all nine chapters of the work, rekindling interest in the manuscript for the first time in nearly two decades (1978). While studying Sanskrit literature and art history in post-independent India, Sivaramamurti assigned the text an entirely different significance, one that validated "Indian naturalism," The way that Coomaraswamy used the book to buttress his assertions of transcendentalism during the colonial period, however, was much different from this.

3. The early texts

It is only in Tibetan that the Citralakshana of Nagnajit has survived, despite the fact that it was originally a Sanskrit work. In spite of the fact that the Citralakshana was written in Tibetan at some point in its history, it is important to the study of Indian citrasutras because it was translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan at some point in its history and can therefore be treated as a text belonging to the Indian tradition despite its Tibetan origins. Together with the Vishnudharmottara, it is believed to be one of the first texts on the subject in the Western tradition. The Citralakshana is currently divided into three chapters, however it may have originally been longer. Given the fact that references to other subjects can be found in chapter three, and that there is mention of 36 different varieties of countenances whose descriptions do not appear anywhere else in the book, this is the case. Chapter three also contains references to other themes (Goswamy and Dallapiccola 1976, pp. 26-27). In the Citralakshana, Nagnajit is credited with creating it, albeit his exact identity is still up in the air. Laufer (1913) offers a slew of hypotheses regarding Nagnajit's identity, including that he was a prince of Gandhara, a Jain monk, and other possibilities (Goswamy and Dallapiccola 1976, p. 12). The Nagnajit of Shukla (1957, p. 10) is described as a "Naga king of ancient antiquity," according to Shukla. In their book, Goswamy and Dallapiccola (1976, p. xii) claim that the name Nagnajit appears numerous times in early Indian literature, including references to an Asura king of Gandhara, a master architect mentioned in the Matsya Purana,

and also a Dravida authority cited by Varahamihira in the *Brhat Samhita*, but we have been unable to determine whether any of these individuals can be identified.

4. Coomaraswamy's Reading of the Citrasūtra: A Founding Moment in Indian Art History

As a result of his deep devotion to transcendentalism, Coomaraswamy found himself compelled to interpret the old *ilpastras* through the same prism that he used to perceive them. I have previously written about his negotiating with the oddity posed by the *ilpastras* (Dave-Mukherji 2008, 132–134), and I will do so again here. Let's take a look at how his translation affects the meaning of the term *sdya*. To illustrate, consider Coomaraswamy's translation of *Adhyaka* 41 of the *Citrastra*, which essentially specifies four categories of painting: *Satya*, *Deika*, *Ngara*, and *Mira*, as an example of what he is talking about. He concentrated his attention on the first group in particular since it appeared to present a challenge to his presumption that naturalism has no place in Indian artistic expression.

5. Conclusion

The importance of physiognomy in the *citrasutras* cannot be overstated. A text from the 11th century that appears to continue the practise of categorising men and women according to five preconceptions of their physical appearance stands out as an exception. The *Samarangana Sutradhara* is a text that appears to continue the practise of categorising men and women according to five preconceptions of their physical appearance. The *Vishnudharmottara*, which specifies in its hierarchy of figures the manner in which they should be depicted according to this division as well as the manner in which they should be shown according to this division, appears to have little practical use for painting purposes. According to what appears to be the textual evidence, certain physiognomic characteristics, such characteristics like having the arms of an elephant or speaking in the voice of a swan do not appear to have any iconographic significance, and even if they did, they would be impossible to recognise in actual painting or sculpture because of their unusual appearance. 91 points are required because the qualities' culturally distinct origins, which are detailed below, account for the high level of difficulty. It is easier to appreciate these injunctions when viewed in conjunction with the *Brhat Samhita* and *Saravali's* chapters on physiognomy, which aid us in comprehending some of the characteristics that appear to have more symbolic significance than a practical significance. The conch-like neck, which is shown in great detail

by the Citralakshana and can also be seen in real paintings in which the humans are depicted with three lines on their necks, as can be seen in the image above, is one notable exception to this rule. In this regard, several Buddhist schools of painting, including those found in Sri Lanka and Tibet, as well as many other schools of painting around the world, are united in their pursuit of this objective.

6. References

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