

CUET · FINE ARTS · CLASS XI · CODE 312

Later Mural Traditions

CUET unit: Indian Art (Painting Traditions — Post-Ajanta to Pre-Modern)

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Snapshot

- Mural painting in India continued after Ajanta, at South and Deccan sites from the 6th to 18th centuries CE.
- Five key mural traditions: Badami (Chalukya), Pallava–Pandya–Chola, Vijayanagara, Nayaka, and Kerala.
- Stylistic conventions (profile faces, elongated torsos, two-dimensionality, rectilinear compartments) evolved across dynasties.
- Important for CUET because it links dynastic chronology to specific sites, patrons, themes, and stylistic markers — a high-yield factual recall area.
- Concludes with folk mural traditions (pithoro, Mithila, warli) that survive in villages today.
- Bridges the post-Ajanta gap up to the period when miniature painting (Class XII chapter) emerges as the dominant pictorial medium.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

After the great Ajanta cycles of the 5th century CE, very few painting sites survived to the present day, although sculptures were routinely plastered and painted, and cave-excavation continued across the Deccan and South with simultaneous sculpting and painting (NCERT §Intro, p. 61). The Indian mural continuum can be reconstructed from disparate but high-quality surviving fragments: the Indian wall-painting tradition did not die with Ajanta but migrated southward and was adapted by successive dynasties.

The first major site is Badami in Karnataka, which was the capital of the early Chalukyan dynasty that ruled from 543 to 598 CE. With the decline of the Vakatakas, the Chalukyas had established power in the Deccan, and Badami's rock-cut caves became the principal heir to the Ajanta tradition (NCERT §Badami, p. 61). Cave No. 4 at Badami was patronised by the Chalukya king Mangalesha, the younger son of Pulakesi I and the brother of Kirtivarman I. The dedicatory inscription is dated 578–579 CE and records the dedication of an image of Vishnu — for which reason the cave is popularly called the Vishnu Cave. Only a fragment of painting survives, on the vaulted roof of the front mandapa, depicting palace scenes including Kirtivarman seated with his wife and feudatories watching a dance performance, with Indra and his retinue in a corner. NCERT describes the Badami style as a direct extension of the Ajanta mural tradition

into South India: sinuously drawn lines, fluid forms, compact composition, large eye-sockets, half-closed eyes, protruding lips and a sense of volume created by simple line treatment rather than by heavy modelling (NCERT §Badami, pp. 61–62).

Next come the Pallava, Pandya and Chola muralists. The Pallava king Mahendravarma I, who ruled in the seventh century, built temples at Panamalai, Mandagapattu and Kanchipuram. His Mandagapattu inscription bestows on him three honorific titles that CUET examiners love to test: Vichitrachitta ("curious-minded"), Chitrakarapuli ("tiger among artists") and Chaityakari ("temple builder"). These three titles together signal the new royal self-identification as a connoisseur, an artist and a builder — a self-conception that will recur in later dynasties (NCERT §Pallava-Pandya-Chola, pp. 62–63). The Kanchipuram temple paintings, patronised by the later Pallava king Rajsimha, depict the Somaskanda theme — Shiva, Uma and the infant Skanda — and are stylistically characterised by round, large faces, rhythmic lines with increased ornamentation, and elongated torsos.

The Pandya murals survive chiefly at Tirumalaipuram caves and at the Jain caves of Sittanvasal. At Sittanvasal, paintings occur on the ceilings of shrines, in the verandas and on the brackets; pillars are decorated with dancing celestial nymphs in vermilion red on a lighter background, with bodies modelled subtly in yellow. The captioned Sittanvasal panel is dated to the early Pandya period, ninth century CE (NCERT §Pallava-Pandya-Chola, p. 63).

The Chola mural tradition extends from the 9th to the 13th century, reaching its zenith in the 11th century. The masterpieces are at Brihadeswara at Thanjavur, at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, and at Darasuram, built respectively under Rajaraja Chola, Rajendra Chola and Rajaraja Chola II (NCERT §Pallava-Pandya-Chola, p. 64). The Brihadeswara paintings are located on the walls of the narrow passage that runs round the shrine, and they consist of two superimposed layers. The upper layer was painted in the Nayak period (16th century); cleaning of the upper layer revealed the great Chola layer beneath, showing Shiva in Kailash, Shiva as Tripurantaka, Shiva as Nataraja, Rajaraja with his mentor Kuruvar, and various dancing figures. The two-layer Brihadeswara fact is a perennial CUET favourite, including in Assertion-Reason format.

The next section is Vijayanagara murals (14th–16th century). The Vijayanagara empire captured the region from Hampi to Trichy, with Hampi as the capital. The earliest Vijayanagara murals are at Tiruparakunram (14th century). The Virupaksha temple at Hampi has ceiling paintings of the dynastic history of Vijayanagara rulers, scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and a famous panel showing Vidyaranya — the spiritual teacher of Bukkaraya Harsha — being carried in a palanquin; Vishnu's incarnations are also depicted on the ceilings (NCERT §Vijayanagara Murals, pp. 64–65). The Vijayanagara style is characterised by faces shown in profile but with large frontal eyes, narrow waists, two-dimensional figures and objects, still but fluid lines, and rectilinear compositional compartments. Lepakshi near Hindupur in Andhra Pradesh — particularly the Virbhadrha (Shiva) temple — preserves glorious examples of mature Vijayanagara murals.

The Nayaka paintings (17th–18th century) at Thiruparakunram, Sreerangam and Tiruvarur depict the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, Krishna-leela episodes, the Muchukunda legend (at Tiruvarur), and the Bhikshatana Murti and Mohini panels (at Chidambaram). The Sri Krishna temple at Chengam in Arcot district has 60 Ramayana panels of the late Nayaka period (NCERT §Vijayanagara Murals, pp. 65–66). The Nayaka style is essentially a continuation and elaboration of the Vijayanagara style — profile figures against flat backgrounds, slim-waisted males with less heavy abdomens than their Vijayanagara predecessors — with the Nataraja at Tiruvalanjuli serving as a classic illustration (NCERT §Nayaka, p. 66).

Kerala murals (16th–18th century) developed a distinct pictorial language by drawing cues from the contemporary Kerala performing tradition of Kathakali and from the ritual floor painting known as kalam ezhuthu. The Kerala style is recognised by vibrant luminous colours, three-dimensional human figures and an emphasis on facial expression. More than sixty Kerala mural sites survive, including three royal palaces — the Dutch palace at Kochi, the Krishnapuram palace at Kayamkulam and the Padmanabhapuram palace. The mature phase is best represented at the Pundareekapuram Krishna temple, Panayanarkavu, Thirukodithanam, the Triprayar Sri Rama temple and the Trissur Vadakkunathan temple (NCERT §Kerala Murals, pp. 66–67).

The tradition extends into the present. Folk mural traditions still survive: pithoro paintings in parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat; Mithila painting in northern Bihar; warli paintings in Maharashtra; and wall paintings in Odisha, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The Indian mural tradition is therefore unbroken, descending from Bhimbetka and Ajanta through the dynastic phases to today's village walls (NCERT §Kerala Murals / Folk traditions, p. 67).

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Vishnu Cave	Cave No. 4 at Badami, dated 578–579 CE by inscription	61
Mangalesha	Chalukya patron of Badami Cave 4	61
Pulakesi I	Founder of the Chalukya dynasty, father of Mangalesha	61
Kirtivarman I	Elder brother of Mangalesha, depicted in Badami fresco	61
Vichitrachitta	Title of Mahendravarma I meaning "curious-minded"	63
Chitrakarapuli	Title of Mahendravarma I meaning "tiger among artists"	63
Chaityakari	Title of Mahendravarma I meaning "temple builder"	63
Somaskanda	Iconographic theme of Shiva-Uma-Skanda at Kanchipuram	63
Rajsimha	Pallava king patron of Kanchipuram murals	63
Sittanvasal	Jain cave site with Pandya murals, 9th c. CE	63

Term	Definition	Page
Brihadeswara	Chola temple at Thanjavur with two-layer murals	64
Rajaraja Chola	Builder of Brihadeswara	64
Rajendra Chola	Builder of Gangaikonda Cholapuram	64
Rajaraja Chola II	Builder of Darasuram	64
Tripurantaka	Iconographic form of Shiva as destroyer of three cities	64
Hampi	Capital of the Vijayanagara empire	64
Virupaksha temple	Hampi temple with Vijayanagara ceiling murals	65
Vidyaranya	Spiritual teacher of Bukkaraya Harsha; carried in palanquin	65
Lepakshi	Vijayanagara mural site (Virbhadrha temple) in AP, near Hindupur	65
Chengam	Arcot site with 60 late-Nayaka Ramayana panels	66
Kalam ezhuthu	Kerala ritual floor painting tradition	66
Kathakali	Kerala dance-drama influencing mural style	66
Pundareekapuram	Mature-phase Kerala mural site (Krishna temple)	67
Pithoro	Folk mural tradition of Rajasthan/Gujarat	67
Warli	Folk wall-painting tradition of Maharashtra	67

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

Key plates students should be able to identify visually include: the Queen and Attendants fragment from the vaulted roof of the front mandapa of Cave No. 4 at Badami (p. 61), recognised by its Ajanta-derived line work and palace-scene composition; the Sittanvasal dancing celestial nymphs in vermilion-on-yellow, with their lotus pond pillar (p. 62); the Devi from Panamalai, dated to the 7th century CE, a Pallava female divinity (p. 63); the Dakshinamurty panel from Vijayanagara Lepakshi (p. 64) showing the south-facing teaching Shiva; the Ladies Attending Parvati from the Virbhadrha Temple at Lepakshi (p. 65), illustrating Vijayanagara two-dimensional rectilinear composition with profile faces and frontal eyes; the Venugopal from the Sri Rama Temple at Triprayar in Kerala (p. 66); and the Krishna playing flute, accompanied by gopikas, from the Krishna temple at Pundareekapuram in Kerala (p. 67), illustrating the luminous palette and three-dimensional facial modelling of mature Kerala murals.

Stylistically, students should remember the diagnostic features of each tradition: Badami = Ajanta-derived sinuous line, large eye-sockets, protruding lips; Pallava (Kanchipuram) = round large faces, rhythmic line, elongated torso; Pandya (Sittanvasal) = vermilion-on-light-background ceiling panels with celestial nymphs; Chola (Brihadeswara) = lower of two layers, monumental Shiva narratives; Vijayanagara = profile face + frontal eye + narrow waist + two-dimensionality + rectilinear compartments; Nayaka = continuation of Vijayanagara but slimmer males with less

heavy abdomens; Kerala = three-dimensional faces + luminous palette + Kathakali influence.

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- Mangalesha was the **younger** son of Pulakesi I and **brother** (not son) of Kirtivarman I.
- The Badami Cave 4 inscription is dated **578–579 CE**, not 543 CE (543 is the start of Chalukya rule).
- Mahendravarma I's three titles (Vichitrachitta / Chitrakarapuli / Chaityakari) are frequently shuffled in distractors; remember the meanings — curious-minded / tiger among artists / temple builder.
- Brihadeswara has TWO layers: Chola underneath, Nayak (16th c.) on top. Students often reverse this.
- Lepakshi is in **Andhra Pradesh** (near Hindupur), NOT Tamil Nadu.
- The capital of Vijayanagara is **Hampi**, NOT Trichy (Trichy was the southern limit).
- Vidyananda was the spiritual teacher of **Bukkaraya Harsha**, depicted at **Virupaksha temple, Hampi** (not Lepakshi).
- Kerala murals draw on **Kathakali** and **kalam ezhuthu** — not on Yakshagana or Theyyam in this text.
- Sittanvasal is **Jain** (not Buddhist or Hindu), and its murals belong to the **Pandya** tradition.
- Gangaikonda Cholapuram was built by **Rajendra Chola**, not Rajaraja Chola.
- Darasuram was built by **Rajaraja Chola II**, not the original Rajaraja.
- Kerala has more than **60** mural sites and three palaces with murals.

2.5 Key artworks / artists

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Mangalesha (patron)	578–579 CE	Inscription donor of Badami Cave 4 Vishnu image	61
Queen and attendants, Badami	6th c. CE	Surviving Badami fragment	61
Mahendravarma I (patron)	7th c. CE	Pallava king with three art-titles	62–63
Devi, Panamalai	7th c. CE	Pallava female divinity	63
Rajsimha (patron)	Late 7th–early 8th c. CE	Kanchipuram Somaskanda murals	63
Sittanvasal celestial nymphs	9th c. CE	Pandya mural at Jain caves	63

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Rajaraja Chola (patron)	c. 1010 CE	Brihadeswara, Thanjavur	64
Brihadeswara Chola murals	11th c. CE	Lower layer of two-layer scheme	64
Shiva as Tripurantaka, Brihadeswara	11th c. CE	Major Chola wall panel	64
Shiva as Nataraja, Brihadeswara	11th c. CE	Chola wall panel	64
Rajaraja with Kuruvar	11th c. CE	Royal portrait, Brihadeswara	64
Rajendra Chola (patron)	11th c. CE	Gangaikonda Cholapuram	64
Rajaraja Chola II (patron)	12th c. CE	Darasuram	64
Bukkaraya Harsha (patron)	14th c. CE	Vijayanagara king	65
Vidyaranya in palanquin, Virupaksha	14th c. CE	Vijayanagara dynastic scene	65
Dakshinamurty, Lepakshi	16th c. CE	Vijayanagara mature mural	64
Ladies attending Parvati, Lepakshi	16th c. CE	Profile-face, frontal-eye style	65
Nataraja, Tiruvalanjuli	17th c. CE	Nayaka mural example	66
Sri Krishna temple Chengam	Late Nayaka	60 Ramayana panels	66
Venugopal, Triprayar	17th c. CE	Mature Kerala mural	66
Krishna playing flute, Pundareekapuram	17th–18th c. CE	Mature Kerala palette and modelling	67
Padmanabhapuram palace murals	17th–18th c. CE	Royal palace mural cycle	67
Pithoro folk mural	Living tradition, Rajasthan/Gujarat	Tribal/folk continuation	67
Mithila / Warli folk traditions	Living	Northern Bihar / Maharashtra folk wall painting	67

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter yields 4–6 CUET MCQs annually, with NTA favouring direct-recall items on dynastic patronage (Mangalesha–Badami, Rajaraja–Brihadeswara, Bukkaraya Harsha–Vidyanaraya), inscription-based titles (Mahendravarman I's three epithets), and site–style matching (Sittanvasal–Pandya, Lepakshi–Vijayanagara, Pundareekapuram–Kerala). Statement-based and Assertion–Reason items on the two-layer Brihadeswara murals and Vijayanagara stylistic conventions are also common. CUET 2024 carried a four-statement Vijayanagara style question; CUET 2025 carried a site–dynasty match.