

NATIONAL ART GALLERY AND MINIATURE PAINTINGS

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Paintings as an art form has flourished in India from very early period which is evident from literary sources and also from the remnants that have been discovered from ancient past till date. National Art Gallery is one such repository that displays such paintings. It is located on the Pantheon Road in Egmore, Chennai. The gallery was initially known as the Victoria Memorial Hall. Built of sandstone this hall was inaugurated in the year 1909. This structure was designed by Henry Irwin and was built by T. Namberumal Chetty. This National Art Gallery has the medieval handicrafts, sculptures, metal-ware and paintings that belong to various schools of arts.



National Art Gallery outer view

The National Art Gallery consists of four different sections – Tanjore Painting Gallery, Decorative Art Gallery, Indian Traditional Art Gallery and Ravi Varma Painting Gallery (Sridhar 2012) The miniature paintings from the Mughal era, handicrafts dating back to the 11th and 12th centuries and Rajput paintings belonging to the 18th and 19th centuries are also housed. However, at present the gallery is closed for renovation.

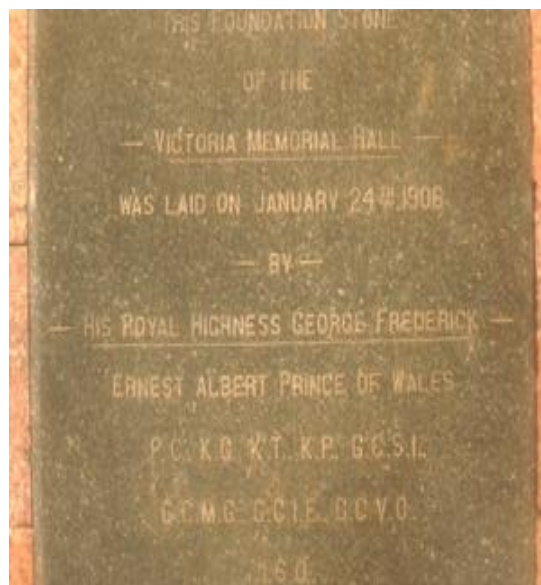
ORIGIN AND THE EARLY HISTORY

It was in the mid-1880s that several eminent personages of Madras felt that they should mark the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign in 1887 by establishing a couple of noteworthy structures. One was to be a large hall for public use with a kind of town hall, for performances, lectures, and entertainments. The other was to be

an institution to encourage the handicrafts of the local population. The former came up as the Victoria Public Hall in the People's Park, adjacent to the Corporation of Madras. It was opened in 1887. Another one, the Victoria Technical Institute (the VTI), was constructed to exhibit and sell the products made by the local crafts persons. Initial Government enthusiasm to support the VTI waned after the grand celebrations of the Golden Jubilee but, when Queen Victoria died in 1901, those associated with the VTI decided to raise funds themselves to build a magnificent hall in her memory which will be of great use for them too. Raising funds took time and it was only in 1906 the foundation stone was laid and work begun.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

In the year 1890 the construction of the Victoria Technical Institute was estimated as Rs.3,56, 255 and the work began (Madras Presidency 1891, 96). The foundation stone of the Victoria Memorial Hall was laid on Jan 24th 1906 by the Royal Highness George Frederick Ernest Albert, the then Prince of Wales. Red stone for the building was sourced from Satyavedu in Andhra Pradesh. The construction work was completed in 1909 and Hon'ble. Sir Arthur Lawley, the then Governor of Madras on 23rd March 1909, commemorated the opening of the Victoria Memorial Hall.



The Foundation Stone

MILITARY USE

The Victoria Technical Institute, which had moved into the building even before it was completed, reluctantly moved to its present location on Mount Road to make way for the military. In 1952, VTI bought the site at Mount road and constructed a building in 1956.

During the World War II, part of the building started deteriorating, when the building was commandeered for military use. However, when the War ended, the VTI did not prefer to go back to Egmore. In any case, the Victoria Memorial Hall was found to be in a bad state. The Government then carried out renovation and converted it into a National Gallery for Art.

ADHOC COMMITTEE

An Adhoc committee was set up in 1945 by the government to suggest improvements to the Madras Museum (Education Department 1945). The Committee comprising of Sir R.A Gopaldaswami, the then renowned artist Devi Prasad Roy Choudary, famous sculptor, Smt. Rukmini Devi, eminent art critic G. Venkatachalam and the then Superintendent of Madras Museum, Dr. A. Aiyappan, (Education Department, 24. 11. 1950). The Adhoc Committee considered and also suggested that the Victoria Technical Institute building on the Pantheon road is eminently suitable for being used as an Art Gallery and also suggested the ideas of purchase of art paintings.

NATIONAL ART GALLERY

The Central Government was keen on the development of the National Art Galleries in all the major metros, the VTI Hall in the Museum complex was taken over for this purpose and opened to the public on 27 November 1951. The establishment of National Art Gallery in the Victoria Memorial Hall belonging to the Victoria Technical Institute, has been taken over on lease for a period of ten years from 09 Sep 1951 (Letter No. 69609-B.G, 51, Finance Department).

The National Art Gallery was opened in that building by the then Honourable Prime minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on 27 November 1951 (Education Department 1951)



Nehru addressing a gathering

CENTENERARY CELEBRATIONS OF MADRAS MUSEUM

In 1951, the Madras (now Chennai) Government Museum had celebrated its Centenary in a grand manner. During the Centenary celebration, the then Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru dedicated the Victoria Memorial Hall, built in 1909 by the British Architect, Henry Irwin, as the National Art Gallery after extensive repairs. A special Centenary Exhibition was arranged to add on to the festive mood (The Journal of Madras Musings 2010, 2).

PAINTINGS DISPLAYED IN THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY

Indian Traditional Paintings were displayed in the National art gallery, there are Moghul paintings, Kangra paintings, Rajput paintings, Deccani paintings, Tanjore Paintings, Glass paintings, Leather paintings, Mysore wood carving, Ravivarmapaintings etc.

MOGHUL PAINTINGS

The Moghul Emperors were enlightened patrons of art and they encouraged the art of painting (Losty and Roy 2012. 123). The events in the lives of the Emperors, hunting scenes, fighting scenes between animals, hills and trees were illustrated in Moghul paintings (Cleveland Beach 1987. 5). The Court scene of Emperor Babur, portrait of Jehangir, Nurjehan, and of Shah Jehan, hunting scenes and fighting between animals were depicted in Moghul paintings. They were displayed in the Main hall of the National Art Gallery.

THE PORTRAIT OF MOGHUL PRINCE

The Portrait of Prince came from Moghul school, the period of the portrait was late 17th century AD. It was acquired in 1963 and the size was 20.5 x 13.5 cm. Tempera (a process of painting in which water soluble proteins in egg white or colloidal medium (as egg yolk) is employed as a vehicle instead of oil) on paper. The picture shows the prince in standing posture wearing a Royal red coat. The right hand is holding a small dagger and the left hand rests on a long sword. Background is in light green colour. This portrait was kept in the National Art Gallery.



Moghul Prince

ALAMGIR II

Alamgir II was the 14th Moghul Emperor, his reign was from 1754-59 (Reeve 2012, 82). He was the son of Jahandar Shah. His Portrait belonged to the Moghul school. It was dated 18th century AD and the size of the portrait was 28 x 22 cm. Mode of colour that was used for the portrait was Tempera on paper. The portrait was transferred from the School of Arts and Crafts in 1951. It pictures the Emperor in standing posture holding a sword in the right hand. The Mughal era was one of great artistic patronage and production of India (Nath. 2004, 54). This was displayed in the Main hall of the National Art Gallery.



Alamgir II

KANGRA PAINTING

Between the late 18th century and early 19th century, the whole Kangra valley and adjacent Punjab plains, were home for very sensitive and highly emotional band of artists, who were responsible for ushering in of the Kangra school of Paintings (Randhawa 1962. 112). In 1945 the exclusive Radha and Krishna portrait was acquired for the National art Gallery from Kangra School, Punjab Hills. The Size of the portrait is 23 x 26cm, mode of the colour was used in the portrait was Tempera on paper. Krishna and Radha are seated cross - legged with heads turned to each other. This Kangra painting also, was presented in the main hall of the National Art gallery.



RAJPUT PAINTING

The chief quality of Rajput paintings were their idealistic representation of the emotional aspects of Hindu life. The portrait of Raja and Rani in a palanquin belonged to Rajput paintings, and the Size was 23 x 27.5 cm. Mode of colour used for this portrait was Tempera on paper. The period of the portrait was identified as late 19th century AD. It was transferred from the School of Arts and Crafts in 1943. The painting shows Raja and Rani being carried in a Palanquin with an old man accompanying the Palanquin. National Art Gallery Main hall houses this.



TANJORE PAINTING

The name Tanjore paintings referred to a certain styles of painting, which attained its characteristics form from Tanjore area during the *Maratha* period. The distinctive characteristic of Tanjore paintings are gold glit and gem set technique (Sastry 2013. 27). The Maratha period Portrait of *Raja and Rani* belonged to *Tanjore School*, identified as about 19th century A.D, the Size of the portrait is 50.7 x 40.3 cm. The mode of the colour used on Tempera on paper. It was transferred from the School of Arts and Crafts in 1943. The Portrait of the Maratha King and Queen is in standing posture. They are shown with folded hands in worshipping pose. Their dresses were adorned with gold leaves. This popular and worthy portrait was showcased in the National art gallery.



Maratha King and Queen

THE CHOLA PAINTING

The Cholas who ruled South India after the Pallavas were great patrons of art and literature. The rhythmic and graceful paintings of the Brahadeeshwara temple at Tanjore, built by Raja RajaChola were the best example of the art of that period. **The** portrait of Srikrishna belonged to South Indian School of Art, it was identified as about 19th Century portrait could be visualised in the National Art Gallery.



The Infant Lord Sri Krishna

RAVIVARMA PAINTINGS

Ravi Varma was the Pioneer of Modern Indian Art in 19th century. In 1873, he won Governor's Gold medal for his *Nair Lady* Painting (Chawla 2009. 109). *Ravi Varma* painted scenes from Hindu mythology and popularised it. He introduced large bright areas of colour in his portraits and landscapes.



Ravi Varma's work was acclaimed at the Pune exhibition in 1880 and art exhibition held in Vienna and Chicago in 1892. *Ravi Varma's* finest paintings of "Sakuntala", "The Miser", and "Lady with the Mirror", "Yasodha and Krishna" are on display in the new gallery lighted with Fibre optic lighting. In order to avoid the deterioration due to heat and radiation, Fibre optic lighting was installed in the Gallery. The lighting was used to illuminate *Ravi Varma's* paintings and other paintings in the back room of the National Art Gallery. At present all the paintings were shifted to Contemporary art gallery, because of the renovation work that is in progress. He dominated the art scene like a colossus (much bigger than life size) form from 1870 till his death in 1906 (Mangaram 2003. 123). The paintings of *Ravi Varma*, and sculptures of *D.P. Roy Chowdhury* (renowned Sculptor), have been housed in the new gallery.



Portrait of A Lady With Mirror

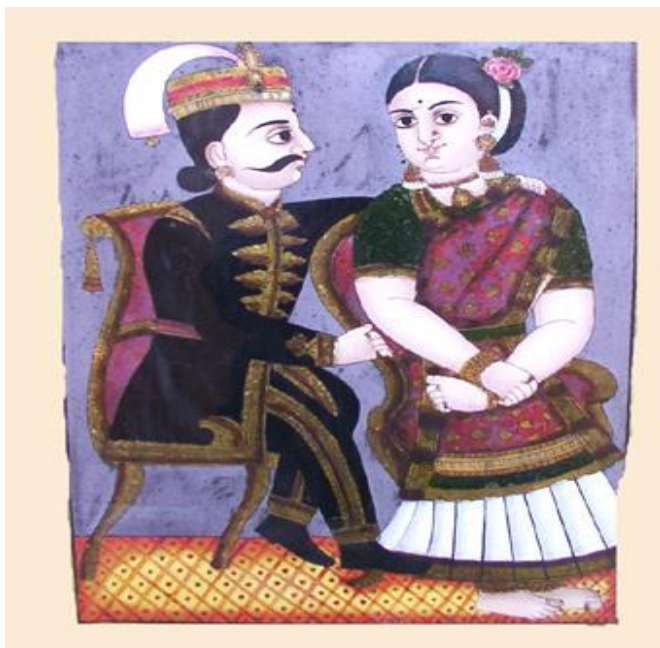
The Portrait of Lady with a mirror, is an oil painting on canvas painted by *Ravi Varma* in the year 1894. The size of the portrait is 122 X 94 cm, the mode of the colour used was Oil on Canvas. The picture shows a lady holding a mirror in her hand and combing her flock of hair. The beauty of her hair style eloquently painted by the artist is noteworthy. This painting won the Governor's gold medal. Portrait of *Ravi Varma*, is an oil painting painted by *Raja Rama Varma*, son of *Raja Ravi Varma* in the year 1951, the Size of the portrait is 113 X 85 cm. The mode of the colour of the painting used was oil on Canvas. This famous Portrait was exhibited in the National Art Gallery (The Hindu 16 April 2016).

DECCANI PAINTING

The *Deccani* painting is an offshoot of *Moghul* school, which flourished during the 17th and 18th centuries under the patronage of *Bamini* rulers of the *Deccan* states of *Golconda* and *Bijapur*. The portrait was expressed as a Procession of *Emperor Gulam Ahmed Khan Bahadur*, son of *Nawab Ali Khan Bahadur*. It was belonged to Deccani painting and the period of the painting has been identified as 18th century A.D, the size of the portrait was 38.4 x 44.9 cm. The mode of colour used on this painting was Tempera with gold stippling on paper. The portrait was transferred from the School of arts and Crafts, Madras in 1943. This portrait of art has been displayed in the National art gallery.



GLASS PAINTING



Painting on glass is another genre of *Tanjore* painting. The technique of glass painting came to *Tanjore* in the middle of the 18th century AD. The portrait of *Raja* and *Rani* are in seated posture and it belonged to *Tanjore* School, identified as about 19th century, the Size of the portrait is 53 X 43 cm. The colour used for this portrait was Tempera, medium on glass. The glass painting had rich colours. The portrait showed the figure of *Raja* and *Rani*. They were painted in modern style. This

glass painting could be seen in the National Art Gallery.

LEATHER PAINTING

The type of the painting is called Leather painting. The school of painting belongs to *Tanjore* School.



The date of the painting was about 19th century AD. This leather painting was showcased in the National Art Gallery.

SANDALWOOD CARVINGS FROM MYSORE

The Sandalwood carvings from Mysore, Size 37.7 x 26 cm. The Panel shows scenes from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The designs such as foliage, birds, squirrels, monkeys are carved on the border of the plaque. The portrait was about 20th century AD.



PICTURES PURCHASED

Purchase of pictures and other things pertaining to the National Art Gallery was sanctioned by the Government. In 1951 Government sanctioned Rs.5000 for the Purchase of Pictures (Government Memo, 18 October 1951). For Plaster casts and Photographic enlargements, Government allotted Rs.1,500 in the same year (Government Memo 1951). Similarly, government reserved Rs.8000 for furniture and fittings in 1951 (Government Memo, Education Department 1951).

As well as for the purchase of pictures and specimens in the same year, Government allotted Rs. 6000. In the year 1951 Government sanctioned Rs.850 for the Purchase of backing cloth for the display of the paintings and bronzes etc (Education Department 11 October 1915). In the year 1955 Government purchased paintings and bronze sculpture for the gallery. (Education Department, 28 March 1955)

RENOVATION AT ART GALLERY

Presently all these paintings are displayed in the adjacent Contemporary art gallery on rotational basis, because of the renovation work that is in progress since 2014.

SUGGESTIONS TO CONSERVE OUR FOLKARTS

- Right from school and college days, Folk Arts should be implemented.
- Special effort is needed to ensure funds for the arts and artists.
- Some Support systems by way of organising exhibitions, Competitions among Folk Arts in Regional, State, National and International level is needed.
- Documentation of each and every folk arts is mandatory for future generations.
- A grievance cell for folk artists are strongly suggested.

CONCLUSION

Traditionally Indians practices customs and ceremonies. People can celebrate festivals like Pongal with Kolam, Kavadiattam, oyilattam, Mayilattam etc. The New Millennium has witnesses a significant change and attitudinal shift in Society's thoughts about folk arts. Need strong, effective and powerful legislations to protect our folk arts and an increased critical mass of society's visibility as impressive role models in the folk Arts field. Further, efforts are required to create greater awareness among the people to include information, education, Communication, street plays, festivals, Awards for Folkarts, newspaper for Folk Arts for promoting effective conservation of Folk Arts. Do your bit to ensure to protect, save and conserve our Folk Arts for future generations.

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