

Chapter - V

**MURAL TRADITION IN
VIDARBHA**

THE WALL PAINTINGS OF JAMOD

The sleepy little town of Jamod lies on the north western fringe of Vidarbha, not far from Burhanpur, the thriving center of textile trade during the Mughal period. Today a derelict and neglected site, it once had strategic importance owing to its position on the highway linking the northern plains to the Deccan, passing through Burhanpur in Malwa territory towards Aurangabad. Trade routes from the north, central India and Gujarat converged to Burhanpur and were linked to the Deccan through Jamod, thereby offering excellent opportunities for trading communities to make the town their base.

It is difficult to ascertain the concentration of the Digambara Jains in this once bustling town due to the dearth of epigraphic records but they must have been settled here in sizeable numbers, going by the only Jain landmark dotting the undulating landscape of Jamod today, the Kesariyanath Digambara temple, whose administrative control is in the hands of the Binayakes, the solitary Digambara Jain family residing in Jamod currently, wealthy landowners and agriculturists who had amassed vast fortunes in better times.

The central image of Tirthankara Adinatha bears a dedicatory inscription furnishing the date as *samvat* 1812 (1756 CE). The temple was presumably built at the same time, with the murals painted sometime soon thereafter¹. Strangely, though epigraphic and literary records pertaining to nearly all Digambara settlements scattered throughout the sprawling Vidarbha territory are available, there are none referring to Jamod, though adjudging from the fairly large temple of Kesariyaji, there must have been a visible Jain presence in the town around the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, enough to initiate a project as ambitious as a large temple for congregational worship, with the onus of patronizing the same falling on the landed elite of the town, the Binayakes.

While a profusion of records are available regarding the roots of the Digambara families of Karanja, Sirpur, Nagpur, Anjangaon, Ramtek and other prominent settlements in Vidarbha, as also from other major centers of Jintur, Deulgaon, Devgiri and Jalna in Marathwada, none reveal any information about the families settled in Jamod. It is possible that the Digambaras of this town did not

vacillate towards the *pitha* of Karanja, but had links with Jain centers in Malwa, courtesy its proximity to Burhanpur.

The temple building activity and its subsequent decoration with murals must have been patronized by a prominent and enterprising member of the Binayake family, the records of the event and the nature of donations perhaps lost in the ravages of time.

The Kesariyaji temple is a two storeyed structure, and does not conform to any recognized form of a temple, whether Jain or Hindu. It is a strange blend of Rajasthani and Mughal architectural elements awkwardly cohered. Devoid of any structurally well defined *garbhagriha*, *mandapa*, *antarala*, or *shikhara*, the temple, which resembles more a Deccani *dargah* from the exterior, has little else except a pillared hall, punctuated by arched windows and niches.

The entire interior of the two storied temple, including the walls, ceilings, pillars, arches, niches, the squinches supporting the dome in the upper storey, the drums and the underside of the dome, is painted. The themes taken up for painting comprises of two broad categories, the purely decorative types which do not serve any other function besides acting as space fillers. The other types include both the iconographic representations of the Jinas, heavenly beings, and monks as well as narrative compositions mostly delineating the key events of the Tirthankara's lives, such as the fourteen dreams, the interpretation of these dreams, the Tirthankara's birth, early days and youth, renunciation, attainment of *kevalajnana*, *samavasarana* and finally *moksa*. The most frequently depicted scenes include the *samavasarana* and the *nirvana* of the Tirthankara. The narratives do not follow any sequential pattern and are crammed arbitrarily in available space.

One of the more elaborate episodes includes the *samavasarana* of Muni Suvrata. The event is delineated in a different and more imaginative manner than the schematized compositions of *samavasarana* witnessed in Jain miniature paintings. The shrine of the Tirthankara is placed in a fort like polygonal enclosure, placed on a high hill, with steps leading to it. Two female attendants enclosed in niches flank the shrine. Two rows of houses are seen below, while

another row is seen near the upper margin. The remaining space is occupied by rows of men and women devotees, while some soldiers carrying muskets are also seen.

An entire wall depicts in twelve separate panels the life of Tirthankara Parsvanatha and includes the palace scene where the king interprets the dreams of the queen and her gestation period **(Pl.277)** The scene takes place in an elaborate palace structure divided into several chambers, of which the left shows the king and queen engaged in conversation, seated on a patterned mattress, while at the right are the queen's private chambers, the upper one shows her being cared for by the *dikkakumaris* engaged by Indra for the purpose, while in the lower chamber one of them holds up a mirror to show the radiant queen her reflection. The fourteen dreams occupy the space below.

The adoration of the Jina is another favorite theme, and shows a Tirthankara seated in *padmasana* in a shrine, flanked by lay worshippers as well as gods and goddesses from the heavens showering the Jina with garlands. There is no attempt to segregate terrestrial and celestial space, the male figures are arranged in double rows, of which the upper row is on the same level as the heavenly deities. An interesting feature includes the schema employed for the garlands which comprise of tiny floral motifs arrayed neatly in strings placed parallel to each other. **(Pl. 278)**

Another frequently represented scene is the adoration by Indra of the Tirthankara, wherein the god is shown carrying the infant for the lustration ceremony to mount Meru, accompanied by his retinue of gods and goddesses.

The painter's delight in depicting court scenes, which are not integral to the main narrative is also quite obvious. **(Pl. 279)** Though featured among the panels depicting the life of Parsvanatha, this elaborate representations appears to be more of a secular scene than related to the central theme of Parsva. The architectural setting is grand, comprising of several palace chambers and halls, with terraces topped by domed pavilions. An unidentified king is seated in the lowermost storey with a couple of ministers standing with reverence. In the upper storey, the queen is being attended by a retinue of female companions. A

similar event to this is delineated in a structure in a garden at the right, where several danseuses are seen performing to the rhythm of a *mridanga*. Behind the garden, two female devotees are observed standing before a shrine.

At Jamod, the iconographic representations outnumber the narrative panels. Besides single representations of Jinās, often framed in niches, there are elaborate representations such as the *chauvisi*, depicting a large central Tirthankara image surrounded by the smaller images of the remaining twenty three Tirthankaras, these compositions spanning entire walls. The Jina figures painted in varied complexions according to their attributes are enclosed in niches, the entire structure sometimes flanked by tall cypress trees and *dwarapalas* or sentinels holding staffs on either side. (Pl. 280)

There are others showing goddesses like the four armed Gajalakṣmī, holding elephants in either of her upper hands and a Jina image on her head, flanked by male and female devotees.

An iconographic representation among the throng of Tirthankaras and Jain deities appears rather unusual, and depicts four armed figure standing on a large hour glass shaped pedestal, with two devotees flanking him. The face of the figure is almost frontal, which in itself is an exceptional feature at Jamod, the eyes large, the chin and nose, as well as the sideburns and moustache, prominent. The figure is bare till the waist, and wears a dhoti with patterned edging, a *patka* tied around the waist, and an *uttariya* draped around the shoulders, and various types of ornaments including earrings, necklaces, armlets, and anklets. In addition, a long garland around his neck almost touches the ground. He holds the *gada*, *chakra*, *shankha* and *padma* in his four hands, leaving no doubt that it is indeed a representation of Viṣṇu. (Pl. 281) This form of a Hindu deity is rare in Jain painting though representations of Krishna and Ganesa were fairly common, owing to their assimilation into Jain mythology.

The most frequent decorative motif employed by the Jamod artist are the floral borders which separate the panels from one another, and trees and bouquets that cover surfaces otherwise not utilized. They are also used in architectural units such as the drums of the domes, cornices and the undersides of the arches.

Geometrical motifs such as diapers, vine creepers, and creepers bearing flowers. The most popular of the single motifs is the cypress type of the tree in a pot or a pedestal, often placed in a niche, a motif derived from Mughal architecture wherein it is observed to be frequently employed in low relief or inlay work, and was later adapted by the Rajasthani artists as also those from central India and the Deccan. The *guldasta* motif or the floral bouquet, a variant of this tree type, is employed very frequently. (Pl. 282)

The wall paintings of Jamod lack the formal and stylistic requisites of the mural tradition. At a glance all available space on the walls, from the floor to the ceiling appears to be blocked by vertical and horizontal registers of varying sizes according to the architectural space, semicircular arches also been utilized to delineate some of the sequences. The division of the compartments is arbitrary, while the scenes contained in them do not strictly follow a chronological pattern of events. The episodes are crammed in a manner which displays the painter's apparent abhorrence for vacant spaces.

The Jamod painter takes a keen interest in delineating various architectural types. One of his boldest efforts includes the representation of the *samvasarana* sequence of Muni Suvrata discussed earlier, which employs the schema of the fortress observed in seventeenth and eighteenth century miniatures from Rajasthan for an entirely different theme. The Jamod artist has a great deal of space at his disposal to incorporate various religious and secular buildings. The composition is dominated by the octagonal fort with four gateways each facing a cardinal direction and flanked by tall bastions. The ramparts, bastions and gateways are all surmounted by parapets. All the houses are arranged at different levels in rows. Instead of the roads converging in the center of the circle in most *samavasarana* compositions a single road joining the gates to the left and the right, and passing through the shrine where Jina is seated delivering his sermon. This type of polygonal representation of a fort or a walled city is observed in certain eighteenth century manuscripts from the Deccan as well. (Pl. 283)

The Jamod painter also displays a delight in depicting temples and shrines at every possible juncture. They occur in almost all the panels, and include the

introduction of the slightly awkward three quarter view in some figures is a welcome diversion

The figures are drawn with a disregard for the scale, the heads appear disproportionately larger than the pint sized bodies, prominently delineated in black. The figures are mostly short, with prominent heads, with curved foreheads, and a variety of noses including the parrot beak type and the pug nose. The eyes are large with prominent pupils and thick arched eyebrows, the lips are pursed and the chin, weak. The men have conspicuous sideburns and moustaches twisted in stylish manner at the tips. The women wear their hair either in plaits or buns.

The male costume essentially comprises of a long flowing *jama* with *churidar*, a *patka* tied to the waist, and an *uttariya* draped around the shoulders. A few of them owe a debt to fashions in the contemporary Mughal court, which could be actually due to inspiration from Rajput courts which themselves derived styles of dress from the Mughals. The *jamās* are patterned with geometrical or floral motifs, while the *uttariyas* too have intricate borders. Some of the male figures even those belonging to royalty, have bare torsos, and wear a *dhoti* with an *uttariya* slung across the shoulders. The male headgear offers plenty of variety, while some royal figures wear crowns with single or manifold plaques, while the Maratha turbans, such as the *Shindeshahi pagdi* and the *Poona pagdi* are also depicted frequently. A variety of headgear comprises of horizontal bands topped by fan shaped elements. The men wear limited ornaments, including strings of pearls round the neck and earrings

The women for the most part are attired in the characteristic Deccani type of *sakaccha* sari, draped elegantly round their rounded bodies, short *cholis* and a *dupatta* covering the head, but revealing mostly the shoulders and arms, as also the chest and midriff. . This costume is common for the royalty as well as the lay women. Female dancers are featured in full sleeved *angarkhas* Some of the female divinities appear on dhoti like garments, worn with short *cholis*. They wear assorted jewelry which includes the *sismag*, circular nose rings.

Earrings, necklaces, bangles and heavy anklets. The goddesses sport elaborate crowns decorated with strings of pearls.

Digambara monks and the Tirthankara figures are shown nude, the former appearing only with their basic accessories of *kamandalu* and *picchi*

The painter also introduces a great deal of paraphernalia, such as canopies of different types known as *chhatras* and *chhatravahis*, including the Islamic invention called *abdagir*, the almond shaped object made of stiff cloth and used as a fan, various forms of fly whisks, *pankhas* and so forth derived from contemporaneous designs. The artist also introduces an ornate howdah comprising of two compartments, one for the royalty and the other for his closest retainer. In comparison to the usual simplified variety, the howdah here almost resembles a miniature pavilion, replete with cypress shaped pillars, cusped arches and domical roof. Its cornice like projection was intended to provide some kind of shelter to the mahout.

The palanquins are simpler, with a seat tied to the underside of a curved beam, festooned with tassels and ribbons.

Furniture and other accessories are featured seldom, such as in the marriage of Aristanemi, vertical rows of pots, canopies and stools with short legs or *chaurang* are observed. There is no attempt what to delineate any of these in perspective. Bedsteads are low, with decorated sideboards and sand clock shaped legs.

It is the vignettes of contemporary life which are of particular interest, such as the panel featuring the ferries sailing in the seas. In one double decker ferry

(Pl. 284) seafarers are arranged in a single row in the lower deck, while the upper deck has separate cubicles for individuals. A sailor is seen keeping vigilance at the uppermost deck, which also has a number of banners. The prow and stern of the ferry are in the shape of horses, with chains attached to them. Some of the ferries have a single deck with forms of birds at the prow and stern. The horse drawn chariots and carriages in the Jamod murals have elaborate canopies comprising of decorative side panels and dome like superstructures.

Despite the multitude of figures of a bewildering variety, there is scarcely any attempt on the painter's part to bring about variations in stances, gestures and expressions. The figures appear either standing or seated, and are mostly arranged in horizontal rows or groups, the painter carefully avoiding overlapping them. In most cases, the groups are excessively cluttered and hence the eye fails to identify little details. Sometimes individual figures are enclosed in colored niches.

The color palette comprises chiefly of a deep red, yellow, shades of ocher and brown, orange, black and white, with traces of blue and green. Red is the principal background color against which the various figures are offset with yellows and browns. The borders are contrasted generally with ocher, green and blue.

The Jamod murals are not isolated examples of wall painting in Vidarbha. The Adinatha temple in Bazargaon, some twenty miles from Nagpur also bore extensive mural decorations which have been lost permanently due to neglect and a general apathy for artistic traditions. Bazargaon as it were, was a thriving trade center during the time of the Mughals and in all likelihood attracted a large number of Jain traders to settle there. Its erstwhile prosperity is determined by the impressive Digambara temples which were inspired by contemporaneous Bhosala architecture, though it is difficult to assign specific dates to them. The question that again arises is that who patronized the mural activities at Jamod and Bazargaon? Did the *bhattarakas* of the Karanja *pitha*, under whose jurisdiction both the sites fell, had a role in their making? Karanja might have provided the religious and spiritual background on which anything like the Kesariyaji Jain temple could come up¹. Who then from this pontifical seat, if at all, patronized the project? Or did the onus of such an activity rest on the shoulders of some other benevolent patron, perhaps a landowner or a trader? Who were the painters employed for such jobs? What was the kind of training received by them? Did this form of painting exist anywhere else in Vidarbha or its vicinity?

Unfortunately, the Jamod murals are the sole surviving examples of this form of activity patronized by the Digambaras in the Deccan as late as the eighteenth century, though we are aware that the tradition existed much earlier, as evinced in the wall paintings at Ellora. Stray examples of murals painted for Hindu patrons in this region also exist, though none of these are enough to provide a comprehensive view of the idiom practiced in the territory. They have been classified as products of the late medieval tradition fostered in Malwa and Rajasthan,³ of which we have limited surviving examples, insufficient to trace a stylistic pattern within themselves. It is however improbable that painters specially trained in the tradition of murals were employed for the project. A close scrutiny of the Jamod murals reveals that they are not essentially executions in the true format and style of wall paintings but enlarged versions of the miniature tradition which was perhaps adapted to a larger canvas. This is also true of the murals painted in the Adinatha temple in Bundi, as it is of paintings in the Digambara Jain *matha* at Sravana Belagola, which also display a similar predilection for compartmentalization and small scale of figures. While a distinct regional idiom is identifiable in the works from the Bundi or south Deccan area, the Jamod murals are representatives of an eclectic style, borrowing haphazardly from several sources, which include the Rajasthani, Malwa and Maratha idioms. The last is observed only in the manner of some of the male and female costumes such as the *Poona pagdi* and *Shundesahi pagdi* and the nine yards sari, and the palace interiors, and is not intrinsic to its style as contemporaneous Maratha painting in the various palaces and *wadas*, are marked by altogether different aesthetic considerations. Maratha paintings owe a great deal to the courtly Rajput style while the Jamod murals are more robust and uninhibited in their approach. The draftsmanship, the scale of the figures, tendency towards compartmentalization and the urge for intricate decorative details and the predilection for borders, link them with the manuscript tradition in Gujarat and Rajasthan of late eighteenth and nineteenth century and it is possible that a painter versed in illustrating manuscripts was employed for the commission.