



# Bihar Naman GS

An Institute For UPSC & BPSC

## Patna Kalam

### 70<sup>th</sup> BPSC Class Notes



#### The Eighteenth Century: A Period of Transition in Indian Art

The eighteenth century marked a transitional phase in Indian history, marked by the decline of the Mughal Empire and the rise of the British Empire. Along with major political and economic shifts, this period witnessed significant cultural changes, especially in the arts. The death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707 led to the decentralization of art patronage, causing artists to leave imperial courts and settle in regional markets. This migration resulted in two major artistic genres: **Pahari paintings** in the Hindu courts of northern India and the **Company School of Art**, also known as "Firangi" or "Bazaar" art, patronized by European settlers.

#### Emergence of the Company School of Painting

The Company School of Painting flourished in British settlements such as Lucknow, Hyderabad, Poona, Benares, and Patna. This art form blended Mughal, Murshidabad, and European styles, catering to European tastes for realism. **Patna Kalam**, a prominent offshoot of this school, emerged in Patna (modern Bihar). The term "Kalam" refers to a distinctive style of brushwork, and Patna Kalam paintings adapted to market demands, emphasizing realism and functionality for European patrons.

#### Development of Patna Kalam

Patna Kalam, an important offshoot of the Company School of Painting, emerged during the mid-eighteenth century and evolved through the nineteenth century. Its development reflects the socio-political and economic transitions of the time.

##### 1. Historical Context

- **Decline of Mughal Patronage:** After the death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707, the Mughal Empire began to weaken. The courtly patronage system declined, forcing artists to seek alternative markets.
- **British Colonial Expansion:** The East India Company's rise created new centers of trade and administration, attracting artists to emerging urban markets like Patna.

##### 2. Migration of Artists

- **From Murshidabad to Patna:** With the decline of the Murshidabad court, many artists moved to Patna, a thriving trade hub, in search of work and patronage.
- **Influence of Regional Styles:** Artists brought their skills in Mughal and Murshidabad styles and adapted to European demands, blending these influences into a new hybrid style.

### 3. European Patronage

- The arrival of British officials and traders in Patna created a new class of patrons. These Europeans commissioned artworks as souvenirs or visual records of Indian life to send back home.
- European fascination with India's "exotic" culture and flora and fauna influenced the subject matter of Patna Kalam paintings.

### 4. Shift in Patronage

- Unlike Mughal court art, which relied on royal sponsorship, Patna Kalam flourished in the **bazaar**.
- The paintings were created on a **demand-and-supply basis**, with subject matter tailored to the preferences of patrons.

### 5. Emergence as a Distinct School

- Patna Kalam gradually developed its unique identity:
  - **Realism**: Adoption of light, shade, and perspective inspired by European art.
  - **Local Themes**: Focus on everyday life, professions, festivals, and landscapes.
  - **New Mediums**: Experimentation with surfaces like ivory, mica, and fabric, apart from traditional paper.

### 6. Role of Key Artists

- Early artists like **Sewak Ram**, who migrated from Murshidabad, laid the foundation of the Patna Kalam style.
- Subsequent artists, including **Hulas Lal**, **Fakirchand Lal**, and **Shiv Lal**, refined the style, adding their expertise and responding to changing patronage demands.

### 7. Institutional Support and Documentation

- The works of Patna Kalam artists were first discovered and documented by **P.C. Manuk** in the early 20th century. His research, followed by **Mildred Archer's** studies, helped preserve the history of this unique painting school.

Patna Kalam exemplifies the adaptability of Indian artists during a time of cultural and economic change, blending Mughal traditions with European realism to create a new and distinct artistic style.

#### Key Factors Contributing to Its Rise:

1. **Economic Changes**: The East India Company's growth in trade created new patronage networks.
2. **Migration of Artists**: After the decline of Murshidabad court patronage, many artists sought opportunities in Patna.
3. **European Demand**: These paintings served as souvenirs and visual records of Indian life for Europeans to send abroad.

#### Characteristics of Patna Kalam

Patna Kalam blended Mughal and European influences, focusing on:

##### 1. Realism and Perspective

- A strong focus on light and shade (chiaroscuro) influenced by European realism.
- Use of perspective to create depth, a notable departure from traditional flat Mughal-style paintings.

##### 2. Subject Matter

- Depictions of daily life: occupations, festivals, markets, and street scenes.
- Paintings illustrating native professions and caste-based occupations, often called **firqa paintings**.
- Scenes of flora, fauna, and landscapes, catering to European interest in documenting "exotic" India.

##### 3. Simplified Composition

- Unlike Mughal paintings, Patna Kalam avoided decorative margins and elaborate backgrounds.
- Emphasis on clean and realistic portrayals with minimal ornamentation.

#### 4. Distinctive Facial Features

- Figures often had pointed noses, dense eyebrows, sunken eyes, and lean faces.
- Male figures commonly depicted with prominent moustaches.

#### 5. Mediums and Surfaces

- Artists worked on various mediums including:
  - **Paper**
  - **Ivory:** Miniature portraits painted with intricate detail.
  - **Mica:** Transparent sheets used for lamp designs and layered paintings.
  - **Fabric**
- Mica paintings were especially popular for creating colorful lampshades that came to life when illuminated.

#### 6. Hybrid Style

- A combination of:
  - **Imperial Mughal Style:** Detailing and technique.
  - **Murshidabad Style:** A provincial Mughal influence.
  - **European Style:** Use of realism and shading.

#### 7. Individualistic Approach

- With no central court patronage, paintings were produced individually rather than collaboratively, as seen in the Mughal Kitabkhana.

#### 8. Functional Art for a European Market

- These paintings often served as souvenirs for British officials, showcasing Indian culture and life.
- Albums and illustrations were commissioned to document Indian life, including flora, fauna, and traditional practices.

The facial features in Patna Kalam paintings were distinct, with pointed noses, dense eyebrows, sunken eyes, and prominent moustaches in male figures.

#### Prominent Artists of Patna Kalam

1. **Sewak Ram (1770–1830):** Migrated from Murshidabad to Patna; known for his depictions of Indian culture and daily life.
2. **Hulas Lal (1785–1875):** Specialized in flora and fauna, inspired by Mughal artist Mansur.
3. **Fakirchand Lal (1790–1865):** Established an atelier in Lodi Katra and contributed to European publications on Indian birds and landscapes.
4. **Shiv Lal (1817–1887):** Known as "Shahi Mushavir," he catered to both European and Indian clients, excelling in ivory and mica painting.
5. **Ishwari Prasad Varma:** The last notable Patna Kalam artist, instrumental in documenting its history.

#### Women Artists

Notably, **Daksho Bibi** (Shiv Lal's sister) and **Sona Bibi** (his daughter) were among the few women artists, contributing to mythological paintings in Shiv Lal's atelier.

#### Decline and Legacy

By the late 19th century, political instability and reduced patronage led many Patna artists to migrate to Calcutta and Benares. Despite its decline, Patna Kalam's legacy remains preserved in collections like the Khuda Baksh Oriental Library and through scholarly work by P.C. Manuk and Mildred Archer.

The lasting impact of Patna Kalam lies in its ability to bridge traditional Indian styles with European realism, leaving a unique imprint on the history of Indian art.