

Ramayana themes in Kashmir art and literature

Abstract: Ramayana has influenced the art and culture not only of this sub-continent, it has impacted across the sub-continent and over the centuries it has been celebrated and it finds representation in various forms of visual representation. Here the presentation is in special context to the region of Jammu and Kashmir, in Western Himalayas. There are many place names associated with Ramayana in Jammu and Kashmir. The ancient text like 'Nilmat Purana' also mentions celebration of Ramayana, in this region.

Kashmir has produced a priceless treasure of art, literature, culture and tradition, including various adaptations of Ramayana. Kashmir literature has been greatly influenced by the Ramayana and in turn it has influenced the world of Ramayana in its own unique way and produced its own interpretation of Ramayana as an art form. The story of Rama is expressed through Ramayana and manifests itself in numerous forms like Ramayana texts, literature, pothees, paintings, sculptures, Ram temples, temple art, folklore, ballads, performances, songs etc.

Due to large scale vandalism ancient temples and the state of mural paintings have not survived in Kashmir. The basis for such expression formed is after having frequented the places known for having Ramayana celebrations and personalized interaction with local residents.

Kashmiri version of Ramayana appeared in Kashmir starting in 19th century and the most popular was the Prakash Ramayan, which was followed by Shankar Ramayana (1843, Sharda), Shankar Ramayana (1888 in Devangiri translation), Prakash Ramayan (1846 in Kashmiri).

Various other versions of Ramayana have existed, including Kashmiri version, Persian version, textbooks, miniature and mural paintings and illustrations in Jammu and Kashmir. Besides this, Ramayana finds a place in other forms like ballads, folksongs, folklore, wedding songs and performing arts.

In Jammu belt Ramayana Murals have survived in many temples as these murals were done in the 18th C. and patronized by the Dogra rulers. But, there are some instances where there are murals which are pre-Dogra period. This also, is a matter of speculation.

In this paper, author will throw light on the Ramayana in Kashmir and its influence on art forms like miniature and mural paintings, their significance and the salient features of this school which existed and influenced the mural paintings in its neighborhood. In these mural paintings, we come to see vivid reflection of contemporary society in terms of costume and jewelry. Apart from the depiction of Ramayana the scenes are also showcased of Mahabharata epic and of popular Puranic stories besides the saints of Bhakti movement.

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