

## **REPORT ON EVOLUTION OF PAHARI PAINTING**

Pahari painting (literally meaning a painting from the mountainous regions: pahar means a mountain in Hindi) is an umbrella term used for a form of Indian painting, done mostly in miniature forms, originating from Himalayan hill kingdoms of North India, during 17th-19th century, notably Basohli, Mankot, Nurpur, Chamba, Kangra, Guler, Mandi, and Garhwal. Nainsukh was a famous master of the mid-18th century, followed by his family workshop for another two generations.

The Pahari school developed and flourished during 17th-19th centuries stretching from Jammu to Garhwal, in the sub-Himalayan India, through Himachal Pradesh. Each created stark variations within the genre, ranging from bold intense Basohli Painting, originating from Basohli in Jammu and Kashmir, to the delicate and lyrical Kangra paintings, which became synonymous to the style before other schools of paintings developed, and finally to the poetic and cinematic representations in Garhwali Paintings by Mola Ram. The Kangra style reached its pinnacle with paintings of Radha and Krishna, inspired by Jayadev's Gita Govinda.

Pahari painting grew out of the Mughal painting, though this was patronized mostly by the Rajput kings who ruled many parts of the region, and gave birth to a new idiom in Indian painting.

In its first phase, the Pahari style of painting developed in the state of Basohli. The Basohli style as found in the reign of Raja Kripal Singh (1678-1694) appears totally evolved with a strong individual flavour which could have been an assertion of the folk-art tradition in conjunction with the Mughal technique.

In the early 18th century, ateliers came up, all practising the Basohli style and introducing local elements in it. Extensive sets, each comprising more than a hundred miniatures, were prepared of the Rasamanjari, the Bhagavata Purana, the Gita Govinda, and the Baramasa and Ragamala themes. Basohli paintings show a stylised facial type in profile, dominated by the large, intense eye.

The colours are always brilliant, with ochre yellow, brown, and green grounds predominating. A distinctive technique is the depiction of jewellery by thick, raised drops of white paint, with particles of green beetles' wings used to represent emeralds.

The Basohli style with its primitive vigour and fierce vitality, bold lines and brilliant hot colours, continued to be the norm till about 1740 when changing political conditions in northern India vitally affected the art of miniature painting in the Punjab Hills. With the invasion of India by Nadir Shah, the apathy of the Mughal emperor, Muhammad Shah, and the surrender of the Punjab governor in 1750 to the Afghanistan king Ahmad Shah Abdali, the situation in the northern plains was in chaos. A mass movement began of traders, merchants and artists who sought the comparative security of the hill states.

The new arrivals mingled with the local artists and the refinement born out of their combined talent left its own mark on the work of the hill artists who gradually abandoned the intensity of the Basohli School.

Two states—Guler and Jammu— appear to have been the important centres of the new school of painting, and the works produced in the changed style belong to what is known as the middle period of Pahari Art.

The new style at Guler in the lower Himalayas was largely the work of a single family of influential artists who may have originated in Kashmir and settled in Guler. Although the members of the family, headed by Pandit Seu, worked at several centres in the hills, the style that developed at Guler itself is the most typical of this later phase, with its lyrical and cool depiction of women who bear their lovers' absence with much more composure than the unhappy and passionate heroines of the earlier Basohli School. Pandit Seu's son Nainsukh stands out as the best known and most innovative artists of the Guler School.

A number of miniatures devoted to the Krishna legend are associated with the Guler portraits and they are painted in the finest quality of the style of the middle period.

Both in Kashmir and Guler a marked Mughal influence can be seen, and while an attempt at adjustment with the Mughal style is obvious at Jammu, a synthesis of the Mughal and Basohli Schools is more satisfactorily realised at Guler.

The drawing is light and fluid and the composition naturalistic. Poses and gestures play important roles in the portrayal of individuals, and the face becomes the index of character. Along with these new features, the qualities of the warm and rich Basohli palette persist.

The paintings of Kangra exhibit the fine workmanship of Mughal miniatures; their tones are subdued and the lines are exquisitely fine and melodious, especially in the female figures illustrating the delicate graces of Indian womanhood. An important theme of Kangra painting is shringar. The Bhakti cult was the driving force and the love story of Radha and Krishna was the main source of spiritual experience, as well as the base for the visual expression.

Bhagavata Purana and the poems Gita Govinda by Jayadeva were the most popular subjects dealing with the legends and the amorous plays of Radha and Krishna symbolising spiritual devotion to God. The paintings portray incidents from the life of the young Krishna, against the Brindavan forest or River Yamuna.

The other popular themes were the stories of Nala and Damayanti, and those from Keshavdas's Baramasa. The style is naturalistic, and great attention is paid to detail. The foliage depicted is vast and varied, and this is conveyed through the use of multiple shades of green. The Kangra paintings feature a profusion of flowering plants and creepers, rivulets and brooks. The Kangra artists adopted various shades of the primary colours and used delicate and fresher hues.

For instance, they used a light pink on the upper hills to indicate distance. Later Kangra paintings also depict nocturnal scenes, and storms and lightning. The paintings were often large and had complex compositions of many figures and elaborate landscapes. Towns and house clusters were often depicted in the distance.

The colours employed are cool and fresh. The colours were extracted from minerals and vegetables and possessed enamel like lustre. Verdant greenery of the landscape, brooks, springs were the recurrent images on the miniatures.

This style reached its zenith during the reign of Maharaja Sansar Chand Katoch who reigned in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. An offshoot of the Kangra School was the Sikh school which flourished under Ranjit Singh of Punjab in the nineteenth century.