

Pahari Miniatures and their Important Features

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Reference to this paper
should be made as follows:

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Artistic Narration

July-Dec. 2024,

Vol. XV, No. 2

Article No. 25

pp. 148-151

Online available at:

[https://anubooks.com/
journal-volume/artistic-
narration-dec-2024-vol-
xv-no2](https://anubooks.com/journal-volume/artistic-narration-dec-2024-vol-xv-no2)

Abstract

The flourishing time period of the Pahari miniatures is approximately from the late 17th to the 19th century. The pahari paintings were first discovered in Kangra by Metcalf and further discovery of these paintings was led by Anand Kentish Coomarswamy in the 20th century. Coomarswamy had exhibited some of the Pahari paintings at Allahabad from 1910 to 1912, where he divided the Rajput school of art into two broad categories: the Rajasthani and the Pahari. The Pahari miniature art reveals a sophisticated blend of detailed storytelling, expressive figures, and rich symbolism.

Origin of the Pahari Miniatures

In 1760 the pahari kalam saw its dawn at Guler. The rulers of the guler had maintained cordial relations with the Mughal kings such as Jehangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb. It is possible that Mughal artists might have sought shelter in the hills after being thrashed out by Aurangzeb. Raja Sansar Chand enhanced his powers among the Pahari kings and many painters of the smaller states started reaching Kangra because it was the most promising state then. Guler was in its youth when it entered Kangra and came to be known as 'Kangra Kalam'. It was due to such examples that Kangra produced the best and the finest paintings of that time.

The Kangra paintings score the highest place in the Pahari miniatures due to the encouragement they received from Raja Sansar Chand.

The paintings of the Pahari miniatures were mainly based on subjects such as the rag mala, geetgovind, nayika bhed and the Vaishnav Cult which dealt with the poetry of surdas, Tulsidas, Keshav, Malti ram, devi and Behari satay.

The Pahari art schools

The Guler School of Art is well known for giving birth to the Kangra Kalam. By 1755 guler had established a definite standard and progressed for the coming 20 to 30 years, it was in 1780 when it reached its peak that many of the best artists went to Kangra. Haripur which was the capital of Guler remained the centre for the arts. Though the guler was influenced by the Mughal school yet the Hindu subject matter was not ignored as 'the Draupadi cheer haran' from Mahabharata and 'Sita haran by Ravana' is an important painting from the Ramayana. There was no competent ruler after Raja Goverdhan Singh, thus Raj Singh of Chamba took over the throne due to which many artists from the guler reached Chamba and many took shelter at Kangra. The artists under whom the Guler art school had flourished were Pandit Seu of Guler (1680-1740) and his sons, Manaku (1700-1760) and Nainsukh (1710-1778) who were famous for making paintings of Raja Balwant Singh of Jasrota.

Kangra School of Art saw its dawn at the end of the 18th century. Sringara rasa is the main component. Separation and union have been depicted through 'poorva raag' the stage before the biding feelings of love start, 'maan' the stage when the sparkling lucid memory of the lover appears all the time and 'vision' which is the stage of separation. 'uddipan' the act of exciting has been beautifully depicted through the symbols of flowers, clouds, moon, red and yellow colors. These paintings have depicted the nayika bhed beautifully, along with the three types of nayika as:

- . Swakiya is the nayika who loves her own lover.
- . Parkiya is the heroine who is loved by others.
- . Samanya is the heroine of all.

The major centers of Kangra Kalam were Guler, nurpur and sujanpur. The subject matter of the Kangra art school dealt mainly with the religious themes such as Ramayana, Mahabharata, and tales of Shiva and Parvati. Celebration of the Holi festival was among their favourites including the depiction of Brahmana. The artists who were actively participating in the Kangra Kalam were Purkhu and his four sons along with Kishanlal, Vaisaya, Manaku and his sons.

Raja Kirpal Singh of Basohli came to the throne from 1678 to 1693. He was a great patron of paintings, and under his guidance and support this art school created some of the most important basohli paintings. According to some scholars basohli is considered to be the oldest school and the main center of Pahari art. Previously basohli paintings were known as Tibetan art, but basohli was situated in the districts of Kathua Jammu. These paintings have a blend of the traditional Pahari folk art and the Mughal style as an exiled batch of the Mughal craftsmen and artists reached here initially. The subject matter of the paintings was again religious and the main artists were Devidasa of Nurpur and Nikku.

The Chamba art school was influenced by the basophil paintings as according to W.G. Archer, the artists of basophil started disintegrating and shifting near 1700 A.D as a result the art of these artists was to be seen in the paintings of Jammu and Chamba. Raja Ummed Singh of Chamba was very well known for his love of art which he encouraged from time to time and his associations with the Mughals. The Rang Mahal at Chamba is a fine example of his appreciation for art, the paintings of which are now preserved in the National Museum; in New Delhi These paintings were broadly categorized into portraits of men enjoying hukka and mythological subjects.

The Kullu paintings developed near the late 18th century. J.C. French was the first to mention about the Kullu paintings in his publication the 'Himalayan Art'. The Kullu murals are well known for their technique of Kauri Gach where the plaster for the wall on which the painting is done is made of conch shells, nowhere else in the Pahari School were such murals created.

Paintings at Mandi were largely influenced by the folk art and the nearby schools for example the artist Sajnu came from Kullu in 1808 and painted the 'Hamir Hath' in which the battle of Hamir and Alauddin Khilji is well depicted. This painting style was completely developed by 1750. The main artists working at Mandi were Muhammadi, Narottam, Moti Ram and Ajmal. The paintings at Garhwal were first discovered by Mukandi Lal in 1908 and according to him these paintings began around the second half of the second century.

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