

Depicting Life on Canvas: The Folk Art of Pahari Miniature Paintings

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Abstract: The Rajput School of Art was broadly classified into two categories namely, the Rajasthani School of Art and the Pahari School of Art. The pahari art originated in the peripherals of lower hills of the Himalaya. The Rajput Kingdoms in the area of Garhwal and Himachal Pradesh provided patronage to the pahari art. The art gradually developed during the late seventeenth century. The pahari paintings played a very crucial role in describing the legacy of Indian Miniature paintings right from the second half of the nineteenth century. It is believed that the earliest diminutive paintings were carved in Basohli, and from here the technique, approach and style got proliferated into the hilly areas of Mankot, Mandi, Suket, Bilaspur, Kulu, Chamba, Kangra, Nurpur and Guler. The artists of the Pahari School were inclined towards Nature and its beauty and therefore their carvings are said to be the finest examples of paintings depicting consonance and harmonious relationship that is shared by man and nature.

Keywords: Pahari Paintings, Rajput School of Art, Miniature, Nature.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Pahari miniature paintings are described as the enunciation of one's persona, approbation of scenery and engraving of one's uncommunicative and classified visions. This art emerged in the areas of Jammu, Garhwal and Himachal Pradesh and was known as Pahari Qualam or the Pahari paintings. During the invasion of Nadir shah, many mughal artists took shelter in these hilly areas and therefore the folk art of these areas manifest the ascendancy and predominance of Mughal artists. Pahari Qualam is the amalgamation of nature's beauty and the exoticism of Mughal court. The art was outspread from Jammu to Tehri Garhwal and from Pathankot to Kullu. However, inspite of having mughal influence and predominance, the artists of Pahari paintings were successful in maintaining the primordial style. The main theme of Pahari School revolves around theology and Indian mythology. To one's astonishment, the Hindu Mythological characters were often depicted in Mughal costumes.

The major centers of Pahari miniature paintings are namely, Basohli and Chamba on the banks of river Ravi, Guler which is situated near the Banganga River and Kangra on Beas. These diminutive paintings are renowned for their tranquility, calmness, describing an artist's expression of emotion in an imaginative and beautiful way, magnificent perception, detail oriented and pictorial depiction of human vehemence. Classical Literature, music and the local regional cultures form the main themes of the Pahari paintings. The painters are very well versed in portraying the serenity and beauty of Nature and women. The painters embellished their art by collaborating emulation as well as fascination while portraying the scenery.

History of Pahari Painting

One can witness the presence of deeply rooted ancient Indian praxis in the Rajasthan Miniature paintings. The art got flourished under the patronage of Rajput kings. Initially the Rajasthan school of art incorporated the elements of mughal court but gradually with the passage of time, a pure and indigenous Indian form of art was developed. Originally these paintings evolved and flourished as a painting or other work of art executed directly on a walls. The Pahari paintings draw their source of inspiration from the Rajput paintings. With the prominence of Bhakti movement in India, new themes got amalgamated into the sphere of the Pahari paintings. These paintings are categorized into two apparent genres:

- Basohli and Kulu carvings
- Gular and Kangra carvings

Many historians assumed Gular as the place of genesis of the Pahari miniature paintings. Their belief was based on the fact that the emperors of Gular region shared congenial and cordial alliance with the Mughals. Another possibility propounded by the scholars was the migration of artists from Delhi to Gular or vice versa. While on the other hand some scholars believe that Basohli was its actual place of origin. They believed that Aurangzeb's viciousness forced the artists to migrate to Basohli region and the Pahari art got flourished under the aid and patronage of Pahari emperor, Raja Kirpal Pal. The oldest Kangra paintings portray King Govardhan Chand and his family which clearly highlights the interrelation of Kangra paintings with the Gular region. It was under the aegis of King Sansar Chand one witnesses the magnificent and exquisite carvings. His reign was also known to be the Golden period in the history of Kangra School.

Features of Pahari School of Painting

- **Depiction of Nature**
Portrayal of nature is bewitchingly illustrated with the scenes or facsimile of trees, saplings, clouds, lush green forests, mountains, hills, water bodies and diverse flora and fauna. The depiction of rainy season with the lightening effects by blending colours, reveals the mastery of the artist.
- **Depiction of Women**
Women are generally portrayed with round shaped faces, thin linear nose, elongated and revealing eyes and sharp-edged chin.
- **Depiction of Garments**
The women are depicted wearing beautiful and elegant style of Indian dresses. They are usually illustrated wearing Lehenga and Choli with translucent stoles (locally known as Odhanis). On the other hand males are portrayed wearing turbans, angrakhas and payajamas.
- **Mythological figures**
The figurative representation of divine figures like Krishna and Radha are also found in these paintings. Here, lord Krishna is symbolized as the Hero while Radha is symbolized as the soul.
- **Colour scheme**
The Pahari paintings are adorned with the usage of scintillating and irradiant colour scheme. The shades of yellow, blue, red and green appear in profusion. However, these colours are used symbolically. The Eastertide or the season after winter and before summer, in which vegetation begins to appear, in the northern hemisphere, sunlight and the ripening of mangoes is denoted by the usage of yellow colour. Blue is predominantly used in the portraits and miniatures of Lord Krishna and clouds. Red colour on the other hand depicted love, fondness and compassion. These colours are blend with each other in disparity to portray realistic landscapes in the paintings. The main characters of the paintings i.e. the Nayakas and Nayikas differ strikingly with each other. The technique adopted by the Pahari painters is known as the opaque tempera technique. In this technique, empera also known as egg tempera, a permanent, fast-drying painting medium consisting of colored pigments is mixed with a water-soluble binder medium, usually glutinous material such as egg yolk. Hence, coalesce or the merging effect of colours is not witnessed in these paintings. Careful selection of colours is do ne by the artists to display satisfying and pleasing effects. In the painting 'Lovers watching rain clouds' in Kangra, the monsoon clouds are painted in uniform and continuous shades of grey and black, providing an aesthetic appeal to the painting. Apart from the abovementioned primary colours, some other shades like pink, mauve etc. are also used. Garments and ornaments are depicted with the usage of golden and silver colours.
- **Linear patterns**
The blend of horizontal, vertical and straight lines is illustrated in the Pahari paintings. These linear patterns depict serenity, calmness, liveliness and strength. The eye is generally portrayed by the usage of diagonal lines that are considered as the masterpiece and holds great artistic value.

Pahari School of paintings

- **Basohli School**
Basohli is located on the banks of the river Ravi, in Himachal Pradesh. The Basohli paintings are considered as the most ancient school of Pahari paintings. These paintings with the passage of time gradually evolved into the famous Kangra paintings. The Basohli style of paintings proliferated into the hilly regions of Nurpur, Bilaspur, Kangra, Nalagarh, Suket, Kulu, Mandi, Chamba, and Guler. The town is renowned for the magnificent illustrations of the sovereign Goddess. The delineation of Rasamanjari text also grabs one's attention. It was carved by the famous Pahari artist Devi Dasa under the patronage of Raja Kirpal Pal. The portrayal of Gita Govinda in 1730 is also considered to possess Basohli traits. One of the most renowned painters of Basohli school was Devi Dasa. He became famous for the engravings of Radha- Krishana and the portrayal of the emperors in their regalia and in white attires. Geometrical designs, scintillating usage of colours and glistening enamel form the chief components of the Basohli paintings. The cynosure of painters also revolved around the lives of the princes, wars and hunting, love themes like the Radha- Krishna etc.
- **Guler School**
Guler School of paintings is also considered as one of the ancient type of Indian paintings. According to some famous legends, some Hindu painters who were skilled in Mughal style of paintings inaugurated Guler School and its technique under the patronage of the Kings of the of Guler region. The ambit of painters of Guler region exhibits the colours of aurora or the colours of rainbow. It was also assumed that the artists use to draw portraits and paintings at a place known as Haripur Guler. The shades of light green and blue were dominant in Guler paintings. The painting also exhibits the taste of distinctive Rajasthani art style as well.

- **Kangra School**

With the collapse of the Mughal Empire, many artists who were very well trained in the mughal style migrated to the Kangra region. Here, they got patronage by Raja Goverdhan Singh in 1774. This led to the genesis of Kangra school of Paintings. It initially got developed in the Guler region and then developed in Kangra. The school reached its pinnacle under the aid of King Sansar Chand of Sujanpur. Multifarious shades of green are maneuvered in these paintings. The Kangra theme of paintings illustrates images of trees, foliages, trailing plants, small streams, rivulets etc. However, the most popular theme revolved around the legends of the God Krishna.

The other popular themes illustrated were Gita Govinda by Jayadeva and Bhagavata Purana. Female figures were depicted intricately and sophisticatedly in these paintings with tender, clear and refined facial features. The colours of these paintings are extracted from minerals and vegetable-extracts.

- **Chamba School**

Some eminent artists of Chamba School are Miyan Dara Singh, Durga and Lehru. The artists of Chamba mainly depicted the folk art. These paintings portrayed the themes of Hindu theology like Yashoda, Radha- Krishna, Gopis, etc. The Chamba painters got sovereign patronage for the first time during the reign of Raja Udai Singh. Chamba paintings resemble in many aspects with the Mughal miniature paintings, also showcasing strong influences of Deccan and Gujarat style as well. However, during the late 17th century Chamba paintings of Himachal Pradesh were being dominated by the Basohli style. Nikka was among the famous artists of Chamba paintings.

- **Tehri Garhwal School**

The Migration of Anirudh Chand, son of Sansar Chand from Kangra to Tehri Garhwal was also associated with the schlep of many paintings along with some of the Kangra painters. The paintings usually portray the famous legends of lord Krishna and Ramayana. The paintings were successful in maintaining the grace of Guler and the richness of Kangra School.

Some important Pahari paintings

Title of the painting	Artist of the painting	Sub- school
Krishna with Gopies	Manaku	Basohli
Bharat Worshipping Charan-Padukas of Rama	Unknown	Guler
Cosmic Dance of Shiva	Unknown	Chamba
Nand, Yashoda and Krishna with Kinsmen going to Vrindavana	Nainsukh	Kangra
Radha and Krishna Looking into a Mirror	Unknown	Garhwal

Krishna with Gopies

The famous Pahari painting portraying Lord Krishna with Gopies is carved by a very famous artist known as Manaku. The scene is based upon Jayadeva's creation Geeta-govinda. It is assumed that this painting was carved for an exclusive patron, Malini. The scene depicts the area on the banks of river Yamuna, where Krishna and the Gopies are enjoying singing and dancing in each other's company. The painting exhibits the traits of Basholi region incised with geometrical symbols and designs. The usage of bold colours in the painting highlights valorous nature and inculcates liveliness and exuberance. Lord Krishna is depicted wearing a bright coloured yellow dress and his upper body is adorned with different ornaments. A diadem embellished with gems and plumules of peacock, is placed on his head. The usage of golden colour in the background provides the painting an intense or extreme touch. The portrayal of human figures is illustrated in a graceful and alluring way. The eyes are beautifully carved which are often compared to lotus (locally known as Kamal-Nayana). The women personage is presented by wearing lavish attires. The painting is one of the highest acclaimed masterpieces carved by Manaku in Basholi style.

Bharat Worshipping Charan-Padukas of Rama

The famous painting Bharat Worshipping Charan-Padukas of Rama belongs to Guler region. The painting illustrates a scene from the epic Ramayana. It portrays Bharat, brother of Lord Rama paying homage and worshipping the Padukas of Rama. The padukas were placed on the ceremonial chair of the king in the palace of Ayodhya. The courtiers along with the ministers are shown in impressive and realistic costumes. The mughal traits are depicted during the portrayal of the costumes. The painting also depicts a person worshipping in Islamic style. The leaves are presented in a very graceful and intricate manner. A white coloured Palace is witnessed on the right side of the painting, while the entire background consists of beautiful carvings of mountains. Various nebulous, mysterious and uncertain figures also mark their presence in the painting.

Cosmic Dance of Shiva

The diminutive painting where Lord Shiva is limned dancing belongs to Chamba school of art. The entire scene represents heavenly and celestial surrounding and is depicted with a tenebrous background. On the left side his consort Parvati, Ganesha and Kartikeya and Nandi, the bull are showed in polychromatic costumes. They all are contemplating the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva. The right side of the painting depicts Banasura playing Tambourine and Mridanga. Various other devotees of Shiva are also showed playing different musical instruments. Shiva's hairs are twisted together untidily. A snake is also illustrated coiled around his neck. His lower body part consists of tiger's skin. The painting exhibits the glimpses of divine mysticism.

Nand, Yashoda and Krishna with Kinsmen going to Vrindavana

The painting illustrates a scene of Bhagwata Purana where Nand, Yashoda, Krishna and the inhabitants of Gokul are depicted going to Vrindavana. The painting is embellished in the Kangra style. It contains thirteen human figures. Out of which three are portrayed swimming across the Yamuna river. The other figures are described exhibiting different facial expressions and wearing colourful clothes. Krishna is depicted half naked wearing different ornaments made up of gold. A golden diadem is also observed on his head. Nand and Yashoda are portrayed in full clothes. Another person carrying a crown on his head and indicating towards Vrindavana is assumed to be Balrama. All the human figures are shown wearing stripped clothes down the loins and their heads are tucked up with bright colourful clothes. In right side of the painting is a tree on which have been shown coiled round creepers. The sky is embellished with blue coloured clouds.

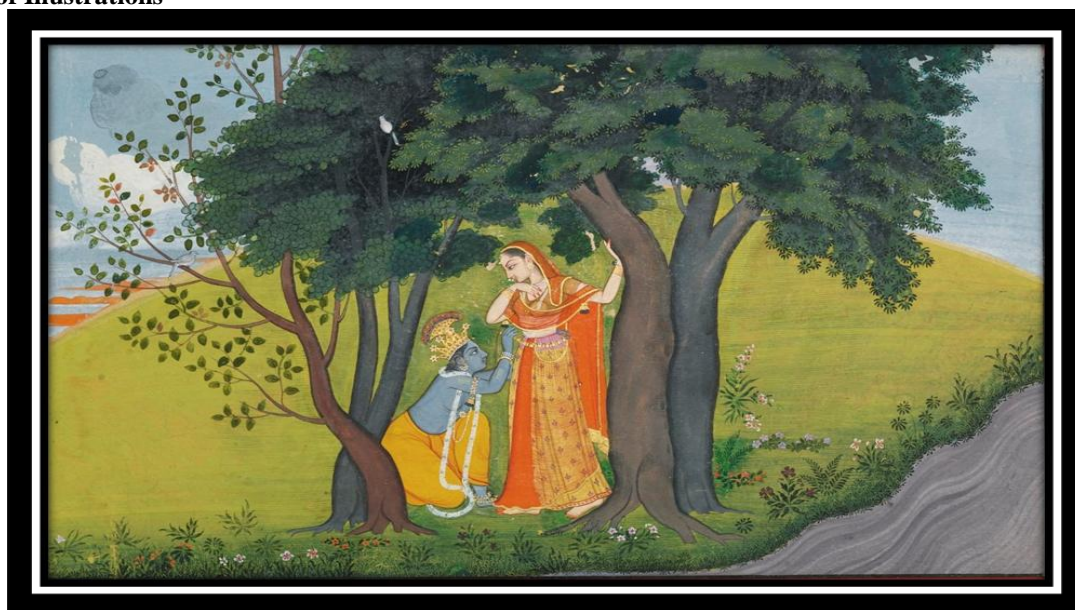
Radha and Krishna Looking into a Mirror

The painting was carved in Garhwal style. The painting depicts Radha and Krishna seated in a balcony on a bright yellow coloured cloth. Krishna is depicted holding a mirror in one of his hands and Radha-Krishna are very keenly and affectionately glancing at each other's facsimile. Two female attendants are also shown sitting in opposite directions. One of them has turned her face towards Radha-Krishna and is thrilled and delighted contemplating them together. The interior of mansion is decorated with a rare combination of light yellow and white colours. The usage of colours in this painting is exceptionally beautiful.

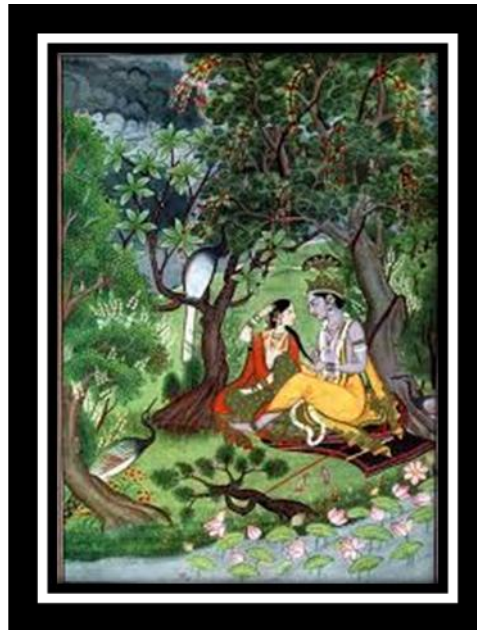
II. CONCLUSION

The pahari diminutive paintings are the asseveration of one's individuality, soul and its sensitiveness. It is the amalgamation of critical acclamation of the charm of nature and depiction of uncommunicated ambitions and desires. The Pahari artists are adorned with the capability of exhibiting the mortal adoration and sentiments accompanied by the naturalistic engravings and portrayals. Nature and art go hand in hand and are complementary to each other for these artists. The nature evolved as the main theme for the illustration of these miniature paintings while it is the responsibility of an artist to decipher the true beauty of nature. Customarily, the appellation of the carvers is not mentioned on these paintings with the appellative of Nainsukh in Jammu paintings, being an exception. The Kashmir school of art also contributed immensely in the progress, burgeon and prosperity of Pahari school depicting the landscapes. These landscapes impart acclamation and eminence of endearment and fondness. These paintings highlighted men as valorous and women as alluring, fervent, zealous and reticent. Every naturalistic feature apprehend with the spirit and ambience of the situation.

List of Illustrations



Depiction of Krishna in the Gita Govinda in Kangra school of art



Pahari miniature painting of Chamba School of art



Depiction of Krishna with gopies in Basohli School of art



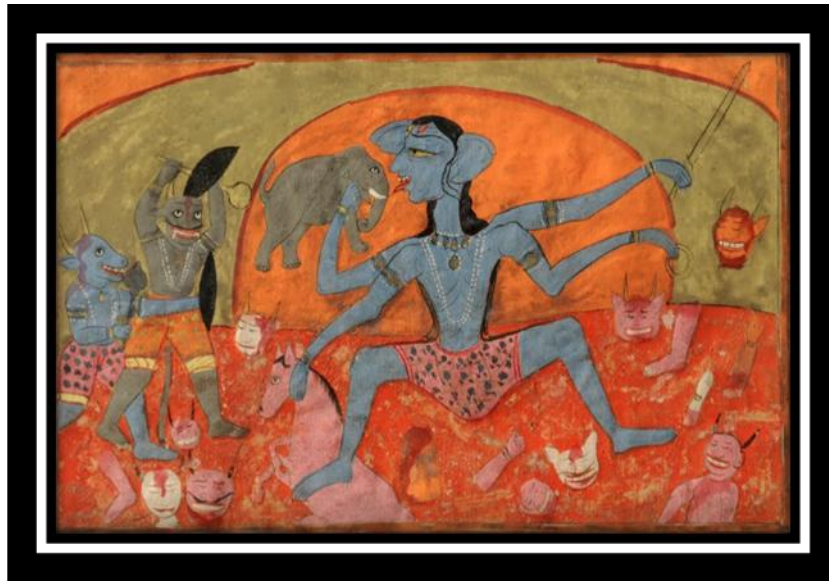
Kangra School of art depicting Gita Govinda



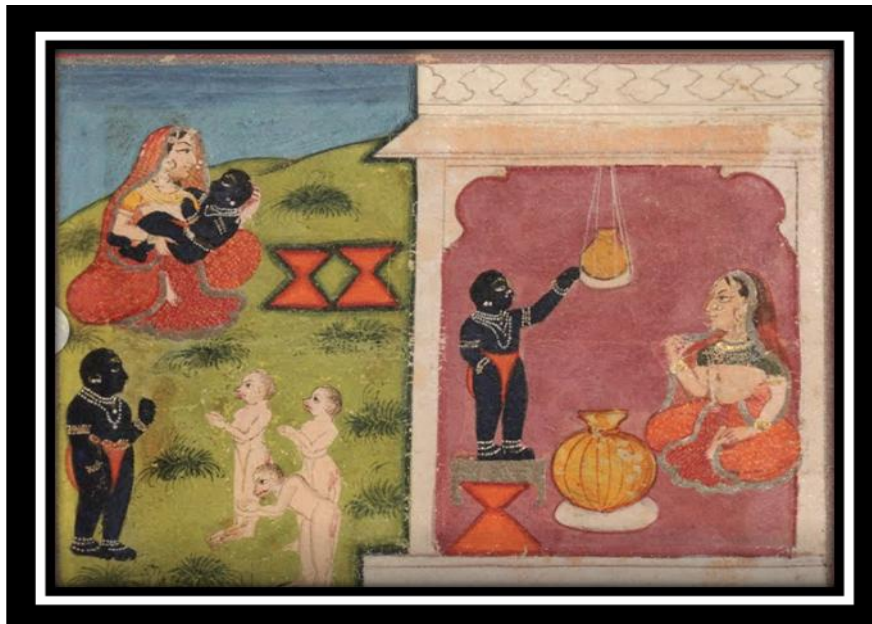
Battle of Gods and Demons in Ramayana



A Pahari painting titled Gajendramoksha



Goddess Kali slaying the demons



A Pahari painting depicting Childhood pranks of lord Krishna

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