



Pahari Miniature Painting And Contribution Of Notable Artists, Scholars, Historians And Art Connoisseurs In Preserving Its Legacy

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Abstract

Miniature painting is a form of art and a powerful way of self-expression providing a sense of fulfilment and achievement. Pahari miniature painting is a tranquil celebration of life and its simplicity. No doubt these paintings are legendary for their subtle elegance and delicacy. Even after hundreds of years, the spectacular miniature paintings continue to impress viewers with their expressive qualities. This paper is an effort to acknowledge the efforts made by notable artists, scholars, historians and art connoisseurs in preserving the legacy of Pahari Miniature Painting.

Keywords: Kangra Miniature Painting, Pahari School, Kangra School of paintings, Miniature Painting, Nainsukh, Manaku

Introduction

Miniature Paintings are examples of exceptional and skilled talent displayed by the Indian artists by doing excellent painting work on palm leaf. Considering the small size of the palm leaves, the images drawn were comparatively small in size (Welch, 1985). The intricate and comprehensive work involved in developing a miniature painting is worth great appreciation and value. Miniature paintings gained prominence in the 11th and 12th century when people starting developing manuscripts to store valuable knowledge using palm leaves. This art got great boost by the Mughals who ruled over India over that period (Steven, 1997; Khandalavala, 1974). But with the passage of time, it lost its significance and was fading into oblivion until scholars, historians and art connoisseurs started writing on it, its styles, techniques, themes and importance.

Historical Background

District Kangra of Himachal Pradesh is pretty skilled in various crafts and arts. The Kangra School of paintings is an integral part of Himalayan art. Kangra painting, the pictorial art of Kangra is one of the finest gifts of India to the art-world, named after Kangra, Himachal Pradesh and a former princely state, which patronized the art. It became prevalent with the fading of Basohli School of painting in mid-18th century, and soon produced such a magnitude in paintings both in content as well as volume, that the Pahari painting school, came to be known as Kangra paintings (Archer, 1956).

Though the main centre of Kangra paintings are Guler, Basohli, Chamba, Nurpur, Bilaspur and Kangra. Later on this style also reached Mandi, Suket, Kullu, Arki, Nalagarh and Tehri Garhwal, and now is collectively known as Pahari painting (Singh, 1982). . Kangra paintings belong to the school of Pahari paintings that were patronized by the Rajput rulers between the 17th and 19th centuries (Chaitanya, 1987).

The account of Kangra miniature paintings and how these came into existence starts from Guler, a tiny hill province located near Himachal Pradesh in the early 18th century. A Kashmiri family familiar with the technique of Mughal painting took retreat in the court of Raja Dalip Singh of Guler, which resulted in the amalgamation of the native art of Guler and the one practiced by the Kashmiri artists. Shortly, the local artists were motivated by the innovative style of paintings and started trialling it. The traditional classic paintings portraying love and depiction of kings and queens were substituted by the scenes showing nature and love accounts of Radha and Krishna (Goswamy and Fischer 1997).

Consequently, the Kangra painting gradually made its way into the Himalayan culture. With the passage of time the Kangra paintings reached new heights under the patronage of Maharaja Sansar Chand, who was known for his liberalism and his passionate commitment towards Lord Krishna. It is said that he used to pay artists generously for depicting scenes from the life of Lord Krishna. It is from here that the Kangra came to be known as one of the most fascinating and inimitable art forms of India. The Kangra style became well well-established in the Hills and many offshoots emerged in the regions. Bhuri Singh Museum in Chamba is best known for its wonderful collection of the Pahari miniatures.

Themes of Kangra Miniature Painting

Its themes revolved around the love story of Radha-Krishna and later 'Gita Govinda' the poems composed by Jaidev visualizing and painting the love life and legends of Radha-Krishna depicting the scenes of Krishna cheerfully dancing and playing in the forests with gopis (Randhawa 1962). The recurrent theme of Kangra painting whether it depicts one of the six seasons or modes of music, Radha-Krishna or Shiv-Parvati remained the main focus. Guler, Nurpur and Sujampur-Tira are the three main centres of Kangra painting. Kangra Miniature Paintings are examples of superb and skilled talent exhibited by the artists. The complicated and detailed work involved in making a miniature painting is of great appreciation and value. Miniature Paintings gained importance in the 11th and 12th century when people starting developing manuscripts to store valuable knowledge using palm leaves (Randhawa, 1966). Some of the miniature paintings gain inspiration from Ramayan, Mahabharat, Bhagvata Puran, Rasikpriya, Rasamanjiri as well as ragas of Indian classical music, etc.

Technique Involved

A high degree of expertise is required as it involves the use of a very fine brush. The strokes used while painting are absolutely perfect, intricate, colourful and balanced impressions. Kangra paintings have a genuine and credible approach, focusing deeply on nature. There is wide use of natural elements in the paintings, such as creepers, trees, flowering plants, rivers, with the rhythmic use of green colour and its several shades (Randhawa, 1994). Known for its precision, the Kangra painting make use of fresh shades while perfecting the face of feminine characters. Later, the artists started depicting lightning and showers. The colours used in the Kangra paintings are naturally available resources. The colours used are natural, mainly derived from minerals, vegetables, precious stones, indigo, conch shells, gold, silver, etc. and are obtained through a painstaking process (Sharma, 2020).

Contribution of Notable Artists

Early Period

It is believed that Guler artists came to state from the Mughal gallery when Nadir Shah attacked north India in 1739. The painter Manaku records himself a tarkhan (carpenter/painter) and declares himself as a native of Guler. It is known that few Kagmiri painters used to work in Delhi at the Mughal atelier, even during the reign of Akbar. Names of some Kagmiri painters find reference during the period of Emperor Shah Jahan. It is possible that Hasnu, a tarkhan painter and father of Pandit Seu, might have had the patronage during the reign of Raja Dilip Singh of Guler presumably in the early 18th century. Hasnu's sons Pandit Seu, Biland and Rughu were painters who initiated a new painting style at Guler (Randhawa, 1966). It seems that this family of Kagmiri painters had contacts with their counterparts working in the plains of Punjab, mainly in the city of Lahore. Members of the Seu family worked in Pahari courts other than that of Guler. Maharaja Sansar Chand Katoch was a supporter of Kangra art. Nainsukh, followed by two generations of his family workshop, presented a typical style that combined Mughal elements with his personal novelties (Randhawa 1962).

The contribution of Sh. Chandu Lal Raina has been immense for he has revived the art of miniature painting. Goldsmith by profession, Sh. Chandu Lal Raina started practicing this art at the age of sixty. He passed on his expertise to his son Anil Raina and other students who learnt the art from Sh. Chandu Lal Raina.

Contemporary Period

In the contemporary time various artists contributed to the revival of Kangra Miniature Painting.

Born and brought up in Sujanpur Tira, a town located on the banks of the river Beas, in Hamirpur district, Himachal Pradesh, Sh. Om Sujanpuri, a noble and soft-spoken artist, created his own style of Pahari Miniature painting. He works in Kangra Kalam and Portrait style in the



Om Sujanpuri, Miniature Artist, Shimla

Image Source: <https://authindia.com/a-call-for-introducing-kangra-paintings-in-school-curriculum/>

medium Tempera, Oil and Water Colour. He started formal training at 19 years of age under the mentorship of his Guruji Kripal Singh Shekhawat, also known as father of Blue Pottery. He revived the art of Kangra Miniature Painting which was on the verge of extinction and created independent art, retaining the miniature technique, which is breaking the shackles of royalty and mythology. He works on miniature paintings on modern themes depicting the life of common people and blends social themes with lush green mountains of Himalayas. He has painted more than 2500 Pahari Miniature paintings and Mural Paintings of temples named Narvadeshwar and Gauri-Shankar at Sujampur Tira, Gopal Mandir at Shoghi, Gandehru temple at Chamba etc. his work is displaced at various prominent places like Lalit Kala Academy (New Delhi), Himachal Academy and Collections in different Government Departments, Private Collections in India, USA, Russia, Canada, Germany, and Singapore and numerous other places. He worked with Sh. Nathu Lal Verma, a renowned artist from Jaipur and later developed his own technique of miniature painting. In the Year 2006, he retired from Himachal Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages. Besides working on nature and other themes of miniature, he captured real Pahari life in his paintings. He is the recipient of various awards and his work has been appreciated around the world.

Sh. Vijay Sharma, a historian and miniature artist has travelled extensively for establishing the techniques of Pahari painting. He focussed on creating paintings style the major schools of Pahari painting-Guler, Kangra, Chamba Mandi, etc. He has painted diverse shades of Ragamala paintings. He is the recipient of several awards, including National Award of Master Craftsman in Basohli Painting in 1990 and Padma Shri in 2012. He worked as Senior Artist in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba, in Himachal Pradesh. He has written books, the important been Kangra ki Chitrangan Parampara (in Hindi) and Painting in the Kangra Valley (in English).

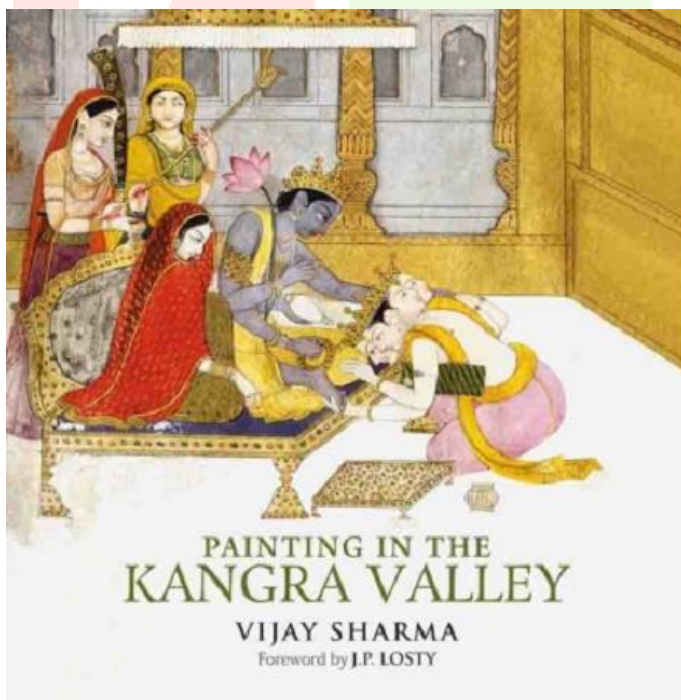


Image Source: <https://hindupost.in/society-culture/combing-nuances-of-poetry-music-into-kangras-miniature-paintings/>

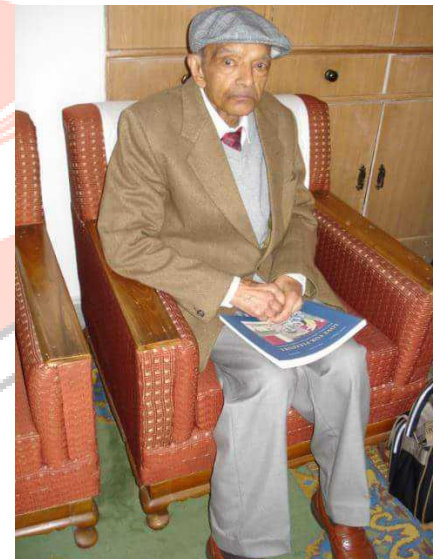
His book, *Painting in the Kangra Valley* is an attempt to study the details of painting styles of Guler and Kangra, which thrived in the 18th and 19th centuries. Love is the main subject of Guler-Kangra paintings, which illustrate nayika in different poses as described by the Hindi poets of the riti genre. The graceful female figures in these paintings are portrayed as beautiful fantasies by the traditional artists with extreme gracefulness and sensitivity.

Vijay Sharma's systematic approach, based on facts, helps in understanding the origin and development of the Guler school and the influence of later Mughal painting on the styles Manaku and Nainsukh. Featuring more than 160 images, this book is a noteworthy read for scholars and art connoisseurs.

Sh. Dhaniram started working on Kangra paintings when he was eight years old. Inspired by his father who used to paint the walls of an ancient temple in Kangra, he decided to learn the art. He also learnt the art from Chandu Lal Raina—a ninth generation Pahari School painter from a family of court artists in the sub-Himalayan kingdom of Maharajah Sansar Chand. Sh. Dhaniram from Dhugiari village is a master artist and established the Kangra Art Revival Forum over three decades ago. Later, to revive the art, he worked closely with the Kangra Art Promotion Society and Kangra Art Museum and under Guru-Sishya Parampara has taught young artists, even from abroad like Germany.

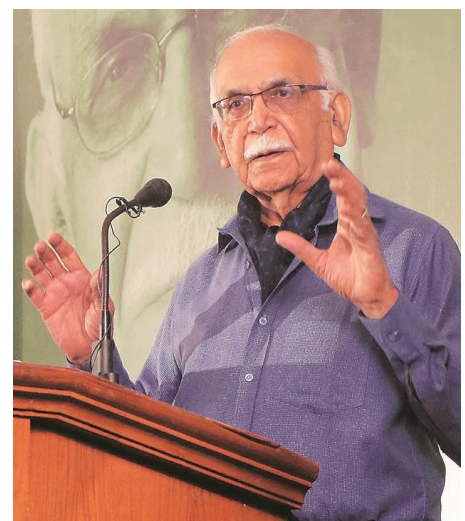
Contribution of Notable Scholars, Historians and Art Connoisseurs

Dr. Vishwa Chander Ohri, the first regular curator of the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba, and the founding curator of the Himachal State Museum, Shimla documented the rich cultural heritage of the state. He was an authority on the Pahari Miniature Painting. With a perceptive eye to identify the flair of craftsmen, he always encouraged the artists to continue the traditional arts. Numerous artists of Chamba and Shimla were benefitted by his know-how and many of them were the recipient of national awards. He had authored several books on the art of Himachal Pradesh and published several research papers. He is remembered for his outstanding contribution in the field of arts, particularly the Pahari Miniature Painting.



Dr. Vishwa Chander Ohri

Karl Khandalavala was an Indian Parsi art connoisseur, lawyer, and an Indian Air Force officer. He was the chairman of the former Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, Mumbai. He was conferred with Padma Shri in 1970, for his contribution to arts. He was also a recipient of Lalit Kala Akademi fellowship in 1980. He wrote many books, the important being the Lalit Kala Series Portfolio No 1: The Bhagavata Purana in Kangra Painting and Lalit Kala Series Portfolio No.2 and No.3: Gita Govinda.



Dr. B. N. Goswamy

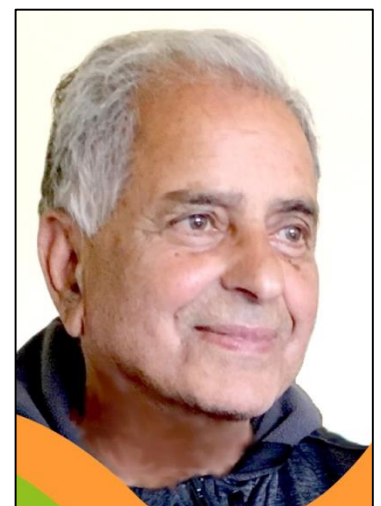
Dr. B. N. Goswamy, who recently left this world was an Indian art critic and historian, and remained Vice-chairman of Sarabhai Foundation of Ahmedabad. He was best known for

his scholarship on Pahari painting and Indian miniature paintings. He is the author of over 20 books on arts and culture, including *Masters of Indian Painting 1100-1900*, a treatise on Indian miniature art. The Government of India awarded him Padma Shri in 1998 and followed Padma Bhushan in 2008. Goswamy is regarded as one of the outstanding scholars of Indian miniature painting with specialised knowledge of Pahari painting. His 1968 article, *Pahari Painting: The Family as the Basis of Style*, was a study of this genre, where he successfully unearthed the genealogy of renowned miniaturists such as Pandit Seu, Nainsukh and Manaku. His notable works include, *Nainsukh of Guler: A Great Indian Painter from a Small Hill-State*, *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*, *Painters at the Sikh Court*, *Essence of Indian Art and Masters of Indian Painting 1100-1900*. His work, *The Spirit of Indian Painting: Close Encounters with 101 Great Works, 1100-1900* is a treatise on selected creations from Jain manuscripts to Indian miniatures. The book *Nainsukh of Guler: A Great Indian Painter from a Small Hill-State* details the life and art of Nainsukh the legendary Pahari miniature artist. He painted some master pieces and become proficient in miniature painting the lives of royals and non-royals in a charming way. In the 1960's, the art historian B. N. Goswamy made a breakthrough when he explored through the genealogical records kept by pandas in pilgrimages in north India and traced the records that gave names, dates and locations of some artists. Since then, he has published a stream of articles and books linking genealogical data with archival records, oral histories and paintings and drawings, which were scattered in museums and private collections around the world. His *Pahari Masters*, co-authored with Eberhard Fischer was a zenith of this exploration. Among the artist-families he was able to find the ancestry of a Pandit Seu. Later, Goswamy published the book *Nainsukh of Guler*, the younger son of Pandit Seu. Goswamy's book categorized and gracefully introduced all works Nainsukh the rock star of Pahari painting.



Dr. M. S. Randhawa

Dr. M. S. Randhawa was an Indian historian, civil servant, botanist, and author. Matriculate from Khalsa High School, Muktsar in 1924 he was awarded a Doctorate in Science in 1955 by the University of the Punjab. He was chairman of the committee to plan Chandigarh city and was instrumental in its landscaping. Of his various works, his contribution the miniature painting in form of books includes- *Basohli Painting*, *Kangra Paintings on Love*, *Chamba Painting*, *Kangra rāgamālā paintings*, *Kangra Valley Painting*, *Travels in the western Himalayas in search of paintings*, *Basohli Paintings of the Rasamanjari*, *Guler Painting*, *Paintings of the Bābur nāmā*, etc. Though all books by Dr Randhawa are marvellous, yet *Kangra Painting on Love* hardly needs an introduction to the academic world. The book reveals author's deep love and familiarity with Indian miniature painting. The author has vividly depicted the art of Kangra Miniature Painting in its best. He has explained the significance of the paintings with scholarly detachment and artistic sensitiveness.



Dr. O. C. Handa

Dr. O. C. Handa, a historian of the western Himalayas, is renowned for his work on the history, architecture, archaeology, and folk arts of this region. He is the author of numerous books on these subjects. Born in the Mandi princely state he studied at Mandi's Vijay High School till tenth standard. He proved to be very skilled at drawing and painting while at primary school - skills that he would later use extensively in his publications. Later, he did an MA in History from Mysore University (1981), a PhD in Buddhist Archaeology from Meerut University (1987), and was awarded a D.Litt. by Agra University (1993). He has travelled extensively across Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh, which reflects in his writings on the history, archaeology, and folk traditions of these regions. He has been a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, the Himachal Academy of Art, Culture, and Language, and the Indian Council of Historical Research. He has been a member of various expert committees of the Lalit Kala Academy and a fellow of the USA-based Infinity Foundation. In addition to hundreds of articles in various national and international journals, O. C. Handa had authored numerous books, most of which also contain his own pen-drawings as illustrations. His initial works on miniature painting were published in form of books, like, Pahadi Chitrakala (in Hindi), Western Himalayan Folk Arts and Pahadi Folk Art, besides numerous books on nag cult, Himalayan architecture and Buddhism. The book *Western Himalayan Folk Arts* describes the folk Arts of the Western Himalayan region in the national and global perspectives to find the traditional bonds between different groups and races. Besides discussing the relationship between environment and folk art, the book also probes deeper study of folksong, folktale, folk painting, folk images & sculptures, folkdance and folk theatre. His book is an honest and thorough demonstration of the religio-aesthetic traditions of Western Himalayan region.

Institutional Efforts

In order to revive the dying art, Himachal Pradesh University in the year started one-year PG Diploma course on Pahari Miniature Painting, which was later appreciated by UGC and a grant of Rs. 34 Lakhs was sanctioned under UGC's Innovative Programmes for starting MFA (Pahari Miniature Painting). This course is aimed at providing necessary inputs of practical work and skill to the student's knowledge of the theory of painting, which will further help in aesthetic growth, capacity to understand and discover the beauty of life and integrate it into one's own personality. The goal of MFA program is to develop creative and innovative artists who are equipped with the techniques of fine craftsmanship and accustomed to the needs of present day society. This MFA program was designed to provide specialized training starting from basics of visual art i.e. sketching, colouring, line work to detailed copying of old masters. The course emphasizes creativity, mastering traditional skills and enhancing design or art skills. This course will make students more sensitive towards their Cultural Heritage, environment and develop an innovative outlook in day-to-day activities.

Established in 2019, the Department of Visual Arts, HP Central University, Dharamshala nurtures the ambitious professionals, and help them bring their ideas to life. Recently, it has started the short-term course on miniature painting.

Kangra Arts Promotion Society (KAPS), a Kangra-based NGO is sensitizing people from all walks of life to the traditions of Kangra Art, the history of its evolution and the importance of preserving a dying art from fading into oblivion. Every year, it roll out fellowship programmes and by training artists it aspires to become a vehicle for their growth, imparting them vital skills among artists to ensure entrepreneurial and self-employment skills. The purpose of KAPS is to

ensure that the tradition of Kangra Paintings and other arts passes on to the future generations. A number of prominent local artists are involved with the society. From time to time, it organizes exhibitions of Kangra Paintings. One of the main accomplishments of KAPS is a Chitera Art School that was started in 2007 to carry forward the tradition of miniature painting to younger generation.

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