

## CHAPTER 4

### PAHARI PAINTING

Pahari painting is celebrated in Indian painting tradition for its aesthetically pleasing, picturesque and impassioned presentation. Spiritual beauty has been depicted with divine devotion in these paintings. This style has transcended all others due to its natural beauty. The spiritual expressiveness and its ornamentation provided a new philosophical and aesthetic dimension to the Indian art scene.

In the early twentieth century, an advanced and traditional painting tradition was present in the Punjab Himalayas the examples of which have been found in these regions. The pioneer art critic Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy has classified this painting style into Basohli, Kullu, Guler and Nurpur adapted as Southern painting series. Shri Ajit Ghosh believes the early paintings of Basohli and Nurpur as that of 17<sup>th</sup> century. Shri J. C. French in his research has stated that the early paintings found at Chamba, Mandi and Suket carry the influence of Basohli style different from Kangra Style. Therefore, it can be said that before the penetration of Mughal influence there was a tradition of painting in a style native to this region whereas in Jammu, a developed style originated in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Jammu was important due to its political sovereignty whereas painting was prevalent in the other regions of the Deccan style in 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Northern painting style, Kangra is the most famous. The painter of Kangra probably worked at Guler before and came to Kangra from Guler. Because Guler had the maximal interaction with the Mughals, this place remained the centre of arts for many years. Raja Sansar Chand's accession of throne and patronage of painting with devotion to Krishna attracted the painters from Guler to Kangra. Another reason for the relocation of the painters was the death of Raja Goverdhan Singh of Guler, a keen patron of art, in 1770 A.D. After his death, the artists could not find conducive environment to flourish and attracted by the painting style of Kangra, came to settle in Kangra.

Basohli, Chamba, Guler, Kangra, Kullu, Mandi, Jammu, Punch, Gadhwal, Kashmir style due to their extraordinary technique and expression are known as the representative styles of the Pahari School.

#### **BASOHLI PAINTING-**

Basohli falls under the Kathua district of the state of Jammu. Today it stands as an ordinary village but the ruins straightforwardly present an introduction to its past rich traditions. The remains of its lacklustre palaces and buildings are concealing a glorious past within their depths.

In the ancient times the capital of Basohli was Ballore or Ballapur. It is presently located 18 kms West of Basohli. Raja Krishna Pal of Basohli's grandson Bhupat Pal laid foundation of modern Basohli and presented himself in the court of Mughal Emperor Shahjahan. There is a painting of Bhupat Pal venerating

Shahjahan in collection of Dogra Art gallery, Jammu. After Bhupat Pal, Sangram Pal, Medni Pal and Amrit pal patronised art to a significant degree. During this period Basohli became the main centre of art and painting work continued till the reign of Raja Kalyan Pal. Medni Pal got *Rang Mahal* and *Sheesh Mahal* (Palace of mirrors) constructed the walls of which were painted with subjects of *Nayika Bheda*. Kangra and Chamba style along with Kashmir and local influences contributed to the development of Basohli style but Basohli occupies an individual position distinguishing it from other styles. According to Mr. Mehta “Alike painters from Bundelkhand, the painters of Basohli were fond of blue, yellow, red and plain colours. There is a bold vitality in the paintings of this style” there is a propensity for ostentation and superficial beauty.

There was a profound devotion to the revived *Vaishnava* Hindu religion in Basohli and so paintings related to the legend of Krishna are seen in abundance. Therefore, the art of Basohli is imbued with literary philosophy and spiritualism. There is a long series of paintings based on literature in Basohli style. With the growing popularity of vernacular literature, many paintings have been made on *Ras Manjari* by Bhanu Dutta and *Gita Govind* by Jaidev. The later painters tastefully painted the *Barahmasa* series and *Ragamala* depicting various *Raga* and *Raginis* and Krishna and Radha play the roles of hero and heroine. Basohli style is known for the simplicity of style, dramatic composition marked by vibrant and bold colours. The painters of Basohli have been successful in manifesting the charm and allure of the characters. There was a tradition of making thin strip like borders, which was painted in flat colours. Borders were usually painted in red and sometimes yellow colour was also used. There are writings in *Tankari* script in white colour on the red border. Basohli style is known for its vibrant unmixed colours. Red, yellow and blue colours have been especially applied. Nature has been presented in a picturesque way in Basohli style. The trees have been painted decoratively queued against a dark background in lighter tones, which is very attractive. In the *Ragamala* paintings, the animal has been contextually painted with the heroine. The tradition of architectural painting has a special place in Basohli style.

Seen in the aforementioned context, Basohli style was a very popular and impressive style of its time. It expanded to the entire Punjab region, Garhwal, Tibet and Nepal. Its calligraphy, colour schemes etc. all have a distinct appeal. The traditions of Hindu culture and religious beliefs have been very well executed not only in its miniatures but in its wall paintings too.

## IMPORTANT PAINTINGS OF BASOHLI STYLE

**SADHU AND KRISHNA-** This painting belongs to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century or beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> century. It depicts a sage and lord Krishna. Shri Krishna has been depicted in blue which is symbolic of lord Vishnu. (PLATE 1) Krishna is wearing a yellow *Dhoti* (loincloth) with a long plaid around his shoulders. The hair is tied up at the centre of the scalp and big earrings with pearls adorn his ears. There is a two stringed and a long pearl necklace. The interesting observation is that Krishna is wearing sandals on his feet. An ascetic is standing before Krishna in the pose of reverence. He is also wearing a *dhoti* with a red



PLATE 1 SADHU (ASCETIC) AND KRISHNA

coloured plaid around his shoulder that is different from that of Krishna. The bun on head is similar to that of Krishna tied at the centre of his scalp. This ascetic has earrings and *Tulsi* or *Rudraksh* garland around his neck and probably has ash on his body where his fair body has a pink tone. Two small trees have been painted in the centre of the foreground and on the side of Krishna and the sage are banana and other trees.

The whole background has been painted green in the painting. This painting embodies the characteristics of the early Basohli paintings. Trees are often depicted in circular form painted in light, dark and solid colours. High horizon points to the very early style and the queued clouds above seem to carry watercolour effect. Figure painting represents Basohli style. Big eyes, high-forehead and aquiline nose are drawn with a single line. The body built has a local influence and they look stout and muscular. The outlines of the drawings are different from that of the Kangra style and are thicker, a characteristic of Basohli style. The border of the painting is slightly thick and painted with red on which there is writing in *Tankari* script. This painting is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

**NAYAK-NAYIKA-** This painting belongs to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the painting, the heroine has come to meet her lover in the dark night. Both figures have been painted in the centre of the painting. **(PLATE 2)** A section of *Haveli* has been painted beside the heroine and trees have been depicted by the side of the hero. Both figures have been depicted in bright colours against a dark backdrop. The hero seems to be giving explanation for delay which is clearly indicated by his hand gestures. The heroine's face is reflecting her anger with a posture of jerking her hand.



**PLATE 2: NAYAK NAYIKA**

By the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was finesse in the rendering and forms of Basohli School. The faces in this painting retain the same style of receding forehead and high nose but the bodies are more proportionate and the toned bodies are a result of later influence. The figures in this painting are as fine as that of Kangra style. The eyes are painted as big as in the early style but the hand gestures and but the conical attires and the organized creases are a result of the developed Basohli style. The lines became less bold and finer with a new rhythm. The heroine is wearing a bodice and a crinoline skirt which is transparent. The male attire carries Mughal influence. Long wide trousers and tight leggings along with a waistband depicting that due to work related obligations, the hero could not make it on time. There are trees behind the hero which have been painted in floral backdrop. The jewellery and ornaments of both have been painted with minutest of details in bright and gold colours. The use of vibrant colours on a dark background, slim beauty transparency of attire, and adornment lend a unique quality to the painting. From the point of view off style, this painting is one of the finest examples of Basohli School.

### **KANGRASCHOOL-**

In the many states of the western zone of Himalayas, the name of Kangra is very important. The name of Katoch dynasty is foremost in Kangra although it has been ruled by many dynasties. Katoch dynasty



produced many famous kings in which the name of Raja Sansar Chand is very important who ruled Kangra and other principalities for a long time.

Raja Ghamand Chand of Kangra played a vital role in the origin and expansion of Kangra style. He was lover of art who recognized talents and patronized many artists from outside in his court. Mostly, it was the painters from Basohli and Guler who sought refuge and patronage. These artists worked to convert Kangra style into a superior style of eminence. They worked well to infuse the local art elements into this style. In the late phase of Kangra style, the Mughal influence can be clearly seen but the paintings of the early phase clearly reflect that the inspiration for these was drawn from the wall paintings here and that style is unique with its own individuality. According to Dr. Vachaspati Garola- the paintings of Kangra style are miniatures of its wall paintings. The expression of the life of a woman, its religious background and assimilation of idealism was happened due to the influence of Rajput School. The painters from Basohli and Guler were already into painting and infusing the local and folk elements into their works. Later, the same local influence refined with Mughal influence to be used in Kangra style.

Raja Sansar Chand had a special attachment for arts. The chief centres of the painters of Kangra School were Guler, Nurpur, Teera Sujanpur and Nadaun.

Kangra painters known to us are Fattu, Parkhu and Kushan Lal (or Khushala). Nainsukh and painters of his family also made special contribution to Kangra. With the passing away of Raja Sansar Chand, the inimitable stream of the painting style of Kangra washed out. =

Religious paintings have been made in abundance in Kangra School. The rules of Kangra were followers of *Vaishnava* sect and the public was also devoted to it. As a result, influenced by *Bhakti* and *Riti* literature, the painters here started depicting Krishna and Radha as nayak (hero) and nayika (heroine). Besides the *Shringarika* (romantic) dalliances of Krishna, many mythological and religious subjects were also painted together with Ramayana, Hamirhath, Mahabharata, Nal-Damayanti, Shiva and Parvati and paintings based on the works of Bihari and Keshavda amongst which Bhanu Dutt's *Rasikapriya* and Bihari's *Satsai* are main themes.

**MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS-** Generally, in all the painted themes of religious, mythological, literary, *Shringara* romantic and *Barahmasa*, Krishna has been depicted as the hero and Radha as the heroine. Nature has been depicted charmingly with dense foliage, birds and animals. The musical instruments have been depicted contextually and harmoniously. The buildings have usually been illustrated in white where shelves and brackets and other motifs and embellishments have been applied. Perspective is not scientific with singular angle but experimentally and interestingly applied.

### **CHIEF PAINTINGS-**

**KHANDITA NAYIKA-** This painting was made in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and belongs to Kangra School and is one in the series of paintings of *Nayika Bheda*. **(PLATE 3)** The presented painting entitled *Khandita Nayika* who embodies all the artistic features of Kangra School. *Khandita Nayika* is a heroine who awaits her lover for the whole night but he doesn't show up for the promised union. She becomes distressed waiting and all her desires are shattered. Instead he comes to her house the next morning after spending a night with another woman where the Nayika confronts and rebukes him for his infidelity.

The painting illustrates the whole scene where the hand gesture of the heroine is an indication of her query and her face is burning in anger. The hero is standing with his head bent in shame. The blue sky is indicative of the passing of the night and the sun over the hill is casting its first rays. The *Nayaka* and *Nayika*



are standing outside their room in the compound and in the background the window of their room is open where a bed is visible on which the *Nayika* or heroine has spent a distressed night awaiting her lover.

The figures of the hero and heroine in the painting have been rhythmically portrait with linear beauty. Fine lines and minutest details have been applied in the drawing of facial features and hand gestures. This painting exemplifies all the characteristics of Kangra School.

**RADHA KRISHNA-** This painting made in Kangra style belongs to latter part of 18<sup>th</sup> century. It has been found at Garhwal and is an illustration of *Shringara* theme. **(PLATE 4)** Radha and Krishna are seated on a *Chowki* (low stool) looking into a mirror. Radha is holding the mirror in her hands supported by a hand of Krishna. On the foreground is a fountain with a *Sadhika* (meditating woman) on either side with rosary in hand, facing away from each other. Behind the compound is a landscape with hills, pond and cliffs. Gathering clouds in the blue sky have been portrayed in dark and white tones. The pond is replete with lotus. In the thicket behind are trees adorned with flowers and birds perching on trees.



**PLATE 3**  
**KHANDITA NAYIKA**



**PLATE 4**  
**RADHA KRISHNA**

This painting has a divine atmosphere. Krishna is the male and Radha is the prime material energy of which all matter is composed. When spirit comes in contact with the male, an illusory world is created. The reflection of Radha and Krishna in the mirror is representative of the material world. The human mind, attracted by these illusions is consumed by materialism. To manifest this thought, a *Sadhika* is turning back looking at Krishna and Radha.

The composition and aesthetic value of this painting is supreme. It has been apportioned on the principle of compositional similitude. The figures of Krishna and Radha are the core of the painting which manifests their undivided wholeness.

The crown on the head of Krishna has been ornated profusely. The figure of Krishna is a bit larger than that of Radha. Krishna has been attributed with dark complexion and Radha with a lighter tone. The *Sadhika* with overturned face is rapt in meditation and the female looking towards Radha and Krishna has playfulness on her face.

### **THE GENERAL THEMES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF PAHARI SCHOOL-**

**SUBJECTS-** Towards the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, the influence of *Vaishnava* culture took over not only the minds of the public but became popular in the field of art and literature. Veneration of Krishna became a favourite subject of the poets and painters. The life of Krishna was close to that of the general populace. Marvels of his childhood, Gopal-Krishna and spiritual manifestation of Krishna as the male and Radha as the prime material energy of which all matter is composed started appearing in the paintings. In *Shringara* verses Krishna was acknowledged as the *nayaka* (hero) and Radha as the *Nayika* (heroine) and started being revered in *Bhakti Kavya* or devotional verses. Therefore, the religious paintings started being painted in Pahari School on special demand.

**NAYAKA-NAYIKA BHEDA-** Paintings based on *Kavya* or verses were abundantly made in Pahari School. *Rasamanjari* by Bhanudutta was the favoured work of Raja Kripal pal of Basohli. The subjects expounded in the book including *Nayaka-Nayika Bheda* started being painted. In the illustration of other *Shringara* episodes, Krishna was presented as the ideal lover in the form of the *Nayaka*.

**BARAHMASA AND RAGAMALA-** Painting of series of *Barahmasa* theme has also been a characteristic of Pahari School. Romantic themes depending on different seasons have been painted. Similarly, paintings based on *Ragamala* have also been amply painted. In both *Ragamala* and *Barahmasa* paintings, Krishna and Radha have been depicted as *Nayaka* and *Nayika*.

**RELIGIOUS THEMES-** Besides veneration of Krishna, religious paintings based on *Bhagwata Purana*, *Ramayana*, *Durgasaptashati*, *Rukmini Mangal* etc. were painted.

**COURT SCENES-** Court scenes were also painted in Pahari School where hunting scenes, court celebrations, portraits of royals and paintings of seraglios were also made.

**BIRDS AND ANIMALS-** Birds and animals have also been appealingly painted in Pahari School. In all kinds of themed paintings, birds and animals usually appeared as companions to *Nayaka* and *Nayika*. There is a lively depiction of birds and animals and their body parts, anatomy and limbs etc. have been represented realistically.

### **COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF PAHARI PAINTING STYLE-**

The aesthetics of Pahari paintings in composition, emotions, beauty, grace, and picturesque qualities are spell-binding. The lyricism and figurative beauty lend a unique effect to the paintings. The illustrations have been made with very fine draughtsmanship. Exceptionally delicate colouring, the graceful curves of figures and the toned treatment of figures take the Pahari School to the ultimate level. Although Basohli style lacks the rendering quality of Kangra still it also can be termed the best because this style has an exceptional colour palette and mellifluousness.

**BORDERS-** Borders have been drawn on all sides of painting in red or yellow colour. A few borders are inscribed with text too. The straight and clear borders are different from that of the Mughal style borders. There are inscriptions in *Tankari* script on a few red coloured borders. Verses have been inscribed on the borders of paintings based on *Rasmanjari* and *Gita Govind*.

**COLOUR SCHEME-** Colours have been used interestingly in Pahari school art. The application of

colours creates an aesthetic appeal. The aesthetics of Kangra Style is represented in the compositional qualities and the fine curvaceous character renderings. In Basohli style, the paintings are resplendent with attractive colour scheme. Bright colours and contrasts have been used splendidly. The purity of colours is spell-binding for the spectator. Colours have been used symbolically creating a mystifying spiritual atmosphere. Yellow represents purity, red is for love, blue is symbolic of Krishna and the infinitely interminable qualities of the skies and clouds.

Gold and silver colours have also been used in Pahari School for the embellishment of paintings and are used in costumes, architecture, brackets and windows etc. The jewellery and ornaments have been painted in relief with use of thick colours where the natural roundness of pearls distinguished.

**DEPICTION OF NATURE-** Nature has been aesthetically presented in Pahari paintings. Variety of trees have been depicted in a systematically organized way against a dark backdrop with fine lines in light colours. The horizon or skyline has been painted a bit high due to which the complete painting seems clad in dense foliage. Dark lines have been used for outlining the leaves. In paintings of seasons- *Barahmasa*, nature is represented in relation to the seasons and seasonal changes.

**ARCHITECTURE-** Another important characteristic of Pahari painting is rendering of buildings which is magnificently creative. They have been usually painted in white colour. Domes have been depicted on minarets and trellises have been painted on parapets. Perspective has been used according to the demand of subject instead of optical perspective. Muscovite of mica white has been used as white to paint buildings.

**CHARACTER DEPICTION-** The figures in Pahari paintings are well proportioned and curvaceous. The artists have shown exemplary skills in the drawings of faces of women, their body postures and gesticulations. The human eyes have been illustrated lotus-shaped with round cheeks, thin rosy lips, and aquiline nose. Lights and shades have been applied close to neck and eyes to lend rotundity to the face. Eyes are expressive and playful. The faces are mostly *Ek Chashma* (profile) and at times *Dedh Chashma* (one and half eyed pose) has been painted. Receding foreheads and high noses are added as characteristics of Pahari paintings, which have been made with a single stroke. Basohli painters were fond of depicting female protagonists with almond complexion and their long hair strands dangling on shoulders can be seen through transparent *Dupattas*.

**COSTUMES-** The male figures have been draped in wide *Jamas* carrying Mughal influence and turbans slanting backwards. Women have been portrayed wearing *Ghāghrā*, *Choli* and a transparent *Dupatta*. Krishna has been depicted in yellow *Pitambar Dhoti* with a peacock feather in his crown. The female figures presented as Radha have been endowed with exceptionally delicate beauty and gestures. Krishna is sporting a necklace and an armband. The costumes in Pahari paintings have been depicted gracefully with realistic creases. The borders of the attires have been lined with gold.

**MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS-** Musical instruments have also been abundantly painted in Pahari paintings. *Tanpura*, *Dholak*, *Mridang*, *Manjira*, *Veena* and *Sitar* are a few depicted instruments. Pahari miniatures are indicative of the dexterity and superior skills of the artists. These paintings show the Indian genius in its pure form. The great merit of this art is its exquisite delicacy of drawing with decorative details using bright colours and weaving the sublime and sensuality together with expression of divine love to take this style to glorious heights.

## **IMPORTANT POINTS**

1. Pahari School developed after the downfall of Mughal School.



2. Kangra, Basohli, Nurpur, Guler, Chamba, Kullu etc. were important centres of Pahari School.
3. Basohli style developed during the reign of Sangram Pal, Medni pal and Amril Pal.
4. Raja Sansarchand was instrumental in the development of Kangra style.
5. Most of the paintings in Pahari School were based on the narratives of Krishna and Radha.
6. Human figures in Pahari paintings have been illustrated in warm colours and nature in cooler tones.
7. Fattu, parkhu, Khushala, Nayansukh etc. were the chief painters of this School.

### **EXERCISE QUESTION**

#### **VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

1. According to Ajit Ghosh the early paintings of Nurpur and Basohli belong to which century?
2. Who said that the paintings of Kangra are the miniature form of its wall paintings?
3. Who are the chief painters of Kangra?
4. Which style developed on the banks of Ravi River?
5. Which colours have been used in the borders of Basohli paintings?
6. Where has the horizon or skyline been depicted in Pahari paintings?
7. Which colour has been used in building painting in Pahari paintings?
8. Who was the founder of Basohli kingdom?
9. The inscriptions on the border of the paintings of Kangra are in which script?
10. About which king has the English traveller Moorecraft written that he loved the art of painting very much?
11. Which king of Basohli presented himself before Akbar with a gift?
12. What did Medni pal get constructed in Basohli?
13. Which two categories has Dr. Ananda Coomarswamy divided the Pahari paintings in?
14. Which style of painting influenced Kangra style the most?
15. The paintings of Krishna and Radha in Pahari School took place under which sect?

#### **SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

1. Dr. Ananda Coomarswamy has included the paintings from which area in Deccan paintings?
2. Which sub-styles are categorised under Pahari School?
3. Which subject has been painted in Rāgmāla series?
4. How many kinds of Nāyikas are there? Name them.
5. Krishna and Radha have been painted as symbols of what in Pahari School?
6. What has Nanalal Chamanlal Mehta said about Basohli paintings?
7. Name the work created by poet Jaideva on which many paintings of Pahari School were based.
8. What kind of paintings were based on *Barahmasa*?

9. How were the borders in Pahari paintings different from that of Mughal School?
10. What kind of Nayika was known as *Vasak Sajja*?

### ESSAY TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Describe the main subjects of Kangra School while explaining the rendering style and colour scheme?
2. In what way was the colour scheme and character painting of Basohli School different from that of Kangra School? Elaborate.
3. What is *Nayika Bheda*? Describe the chief Nayika (heroine) painted in Pahari School along with suitable example?
4. Give an introduction of Kangra style while describing its origin and development.
5. Explain the subjects and themes of Basohli style paintings with its characteristics.