

For Mang

Review of Basholi Paintings  
By M.S. Randhawa  
by S.R.

Dr. M.S. Randhawa deserves a great deal of credit as well as our gratitude for the splendid volume of Basholi paintings which he has just completed.

The book deals with one of the most fascinating branches of the Himalayan school of painting, popularly known under the collective name of Basholi. While the State of Basholi was an important centre of this school it also flourished in other States of the Western Himalayas and covers the early schools of miniature painting of the region during the 17th and 18 centuries.

Dr. Randhawa's book is profusely illustrated with excellent reproductions in colour. The illustrations, as well as the material chosen give a very good cross section of the school as we know it today. Some of the earlier examples are real gems of decorative composition and execution.

There can be no doubt that still further examples of the school as well as new data will yet come to light and we may even be able to link it up with a still earlier tradition. I have always maintained that Kashmir and some Western Himalayan tracts must have had a very developed and ancient tradition of pictorial art, if we can draw our inferences from the wonderful sculptures which some of these tracts have preserved for us. The art of painting usually co-exist with sculpture and architecture in one form or another, but being the less durable it is liable to every type of accident and the ravages of time.

The great Frescoes <sup>at</sup> and Tsaparang, once the capital of the Western Tibetan kingdom of Guge preserve for us an unique and precious key for students of art to explore. According to records these murals were executed at least in part by artists from Kashmir, who were invited there because of their great renown as master painters. Murals are likewise preserved in Spiti and the adjacent territories, of excellent workmanship and comparatively well preserved thanks to the climate and their inaccessibility. Even of this tradition did not survive in other <sup>parts</sup> facts due to climate, strife and so many other vicissitudes of fate, these tracts still preserve for us the precious record of a great tradition. If we but compare some of the landscape treatment, the trees, rocks and other details we suddenly become aware of a common

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parts



tradition and language. It may well be that the powerful and virile Rajput influences came into contact with an already existing, even if weakened by their tradition and brought new life and vigour into the remnants of local ateliers or per chance assimilated this local tradition themselves.

Technical methods employed are one of the best guides to follow in studying the evolution of a style and tracing it back to its source. Some of the Palm leaf manuscripts for instance faithfully preserve some of the minor but striking peculiarities of the Ajanta Technique like the application of certain blues by a technique of dots. The same being true of some of the greens, to say nothing of the general treatment of line shading, detail and concept.

Dr. Randhawa very pertinently draws the attention of the reader to the similarity of certain features in the Basholi Paintings to some idioms as found in the Nepali school. All this really points to common greater source. A tradition which permeated the vast Himalayan tracts from the earliest period.

In planning the book Dr. Randhawa achieved a practical and happy distribution of material used, so important when one is dealing with a subject which has many angles of approach.

His historic references and chronology facilitate the study of the comparative development of the style while the very helpful tables of comparative alphabets and numerals will be most welcome to every student of the Himalayan Schools of art. The description of the paintings illustrated and the rendering of the poetic idiom are a very valuable contribution to the proper understanding and evaluation of the poetic moods and subjects treated and forms a very important section of this book.

Dr. Mulk Raj Anand's concluding chapter gives us a fine and colourful exposition of the conditions which contributed to the evolution of these styles and pictorial tradition of the Basholi school and is a very fitting resume of Dr. Randhawa's introductory chapters and text.



All the material and data in this book is presented with the freshness, clarity and enthusiasm of a genuine understanding and grasp of the subject which is so typical of Dr. Randhawa's work and researches. This book can undoubtedly set a standard for beautiful presentation and of well-balanced material which is so important in this type of publication. In conclusion I would like to congratulate again Dr. Randhawa and all those who were concerned with the bringing out of this beautiful volume.



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PRESENTATION VOLUME FOR DR. M.S. RANDHAWA ON  
HIS 60TH BIRTHDAY

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A REVIEW OF DR. M.S. RANDHAWA'S BOOK ON BASHOLI  
PAINTINGS FOR MARG SUPPLEMENT TO VOL. XIII - 1960

by

SVETOSLAV ROERICH

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