

Article No.2.

We do not know much about the Rajput paintings beyond the 15th or even 16th century, but undoubtedly the early pictorial traditions of Kangra have many features in common with the early Rajput School of painting. We find for instance the use of floral ornamentation which has survived in the early Art called Basholi and Pahari or Gaddi painting the colour schemes and certain arrangements of composition, but it is difficult to go beyond the 17th century and we may infer only by comparing these traditions to some other schools which have been better preserved and dated like for instance the Jain School of painting, the Pala School of paintings preserved in manuscript form, and some frescoes, and dating back from the 10th and 11th century.

In a manuscript which probably dates back to the early 15th or even 14th century from Hyderabad the miniatures show an adaptation of the earlier Arabo-Persian style to some local traditions and among the features of this new combination we see some common elements which we find in the early Rajput and Basholi paintings. The use of tellow and dark red back-grounds with high horizons, the general composition, flowering trees and bright contrasts so characteristic of the earlier traditions.

In an early Jain manuscript one can find some early Persian influences bespeaking of the existence of early Muslim painting in the pre-Mogul periods in India. Who were the artists who painted these Kangra paintings? Under what influences have they come and what developed what we know as the early Kangra style, is not known to us at this stage, but it is very significant that by tradition the artists who were displaced from Rajputana have taken refuge in the mountains and brought their technique which was a technique largely influenced by Mogul Art to the Kangra Valley. The new technique which resulted from their contact with local tradition is what we know today as the Kangra Art. One of their great contributions was technical mastery and tradition which was blended with the local style and adapted to serve local needs. The cult of Krishna, the predominant cult of these regions was the great expression for the majority of these artists.

Under the patronship of Rajah Senzar-Chand who was an ardent lover of Art, the Kangra School reached a great development, in some ways it may be said it reached its zenith and from then on began its decline. We can see in the Kangra paintings how nature and modes of life mould and dictate the expression of an artist. The beautiful scenery of the Himalayan foothills, the new flora, rich colours and well marked changes of seasons, all had their influence in the formation of Kangra Art. The colour of the earth with all the beautiful flowering trees and shrubs, peach and apricot trees in bloom and the beautiful birds, the life of the village, the life of shepherds and the hundred and one interpretations of the cows. The hour of cow-dust, that beautiful poetical moment that you can see even today at sunset when the cows return home from the pastures winding their way through the streets of a village raising the dust as they pass, this scene romanticised in so many paintings has come to us with special beauty in the famous Kangra painting now in the Boston Museum which may be considered one of the finest example of that school. In these paintings the devotional nature of the subject, the life of Krishna, has been beautifully blended into the outer garb of the surrounding life. If one lived in those parts, if one stayed there long enough to see the infinite variety of colour schemes and combinations which nature presents one will understand the Kangra painters truthful interpretation of life as he saw it unfolding before his eyes. All the elements which you find in landscape and in the life of the people you see depicted in those paintings, but you find them depicted in a beautiful way, it is poetised, and you can see that the artist was moved by his love of the beautiful and wanted to depict that which struck him as beautiful, worthy of recording. You can find the rich backgrounds of flowering and blossoming trees, peach and apricot blossom abundantly found over the hillsides of the Himalayas mingling with the gold of mustard flowers coming through the brilliant greens of wheat and inspiring the artist to beautiful scenes, symbols of spring, symbols of the awakening of nature. The brown reds which one sees so often in the Basholi paintings are nothing but the

rich red soils of the Kangra district, soils with which the artist was so well familiar and which he saw before him every day in one form or another. In many ways the beautiful poetic subjects of the Kangra artists could not have had a better setting than the beautiful background which nature in the foothills of the Himalayas provided.

It has been pointed out that the artists have not made greater use of snow or snow peaks. This is true inasmuch as one does not find snow clad peaks except in a few paintings and one rarely ever comes across a painting which has some snow on the ground. This may be due to the fact that nature was usually depicted at its prime in the Spring and Summer when the sun was bright and the trees were full of blossoms and bright birds, when the snow had already melted and one could only find it on the distant peaks (when most of us had descended to the lower foothills away from the greater heights). Winter being a season of rest was not a suitable background for the lyric subjects of these paintings.

The Basholi School of painting, takes its name from the Basholi State, a small State near the State of Jammu in Kashmir, it was the first place where the earlier school was found to flourish and the name of Basholi later spread to include all early Pahari Schools of the district. We could definitely say that there was a general similarity of the early Pahari styles and the same features can be found near the Jammu border and south near Mandi and Belaspur. One could easily call it early Pahari style or school which was superseded later by the highly evolved Kangra style, but continued to flourish in many isolated places to reach a state of great perfection, as for instance in the beautiful Basholi painting, in the collection of S.N. Gupta and a few examples in the Treasurywala collection, now in Delhi. In the later examples they make use of Beetle wings which are made to play the part of jewellery, probably emeralds, as in the Mukuta of Krishna, and other ornaments. The use of beetle wings is not restricted only to certain Kangra paintings, it was practised in other parts of India also and you find it often used in Rajputana. The beetle wings are usually found only the later paintings and I have not found them in the earlier Pahari or Gaddi work. The later so-called Basholi paintings preserved that very pronounced style both in the features of the people as well as in the general composition and colours also preserved some of the earlier primitive traditions and apparently are a parallel development in the Kangra School. The Khandalawala collection has a few fine examples of these Basholi paintings and it would make a very interesting study to establish the relative development of these branches of the Kangra School since they apparently were developed and date from approximately the same periods.

An interesting school of the so-called primitive Gaddi style has evolved round the Southern borders of Mandi State. There you find the bright colouring and rich spontaneous composition of a primitive with a new treatment of colour which is glazed over to give it a more brilliant effect. Apparently this more primitive tradition was just preceding the later Mandi School which has produced some very fine examples of Kangra Art. It would be very interesting to establish whether the different schools had their own sets of painters who preferred a certain style or whether these schools developed according to districts and according to the chance presence in them of really accomplished artists. From records it seems there were several traditions like the Persian, Mogul and Rajput traditions working over the earlier Pahari patterns and it may be that, as in the present day, different patrons preferred different artistic expression.

Some of the Kangra compositions are extremely modern in their treatment and you find a remarkable balance of masses and lines. The landscape being fully balanced and designed for the story for which it serves as a complement.