



PAINTING IN THE KANGRA VALLEY
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This profusely illustrated volume has been contemplated to serve as companion to one of the most celebrated traditions of Indian miniature painting that developed in the Rajput court-ateliers of Guler and Kangra, located in the picturesque mountain valleys of Himachal Pradesh. Trained as a painter and specializing in the intricate technique of Pahari miniatures, Vijay Sharma remained attached to the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba, for several decades. At the same time, he was lucky to examine

closely several thousand specimens in the major museums of the world and in the renowned private collections. This book is full of details, insightful and revealing at the same time, stemming out of his lifetime passion with painted delights, *Braja-bhasha* poetry and classical music.

All the six chapters of the book have a contextual inter-connectivity, unfolding historical chronology and varying nature of courtly patronage, aesthetic attitude and choice of subject matter and, finally, cross-fertilization of concepts and technical modalities. The narrative begins with a critical appraisal of the earliest surviving illustrated text of *Devi Mahatmya* (dated 1552) from Jaisinghpur, Kangra. This crucial manuscript endorses how the vital painterly tradition prevalent in the Jaunpur-Agra-Delhi-Mewar zone extended further in Guler-Kangra region, presumably due to the migrant painter-scribes. The mobility of painter families across the kingdoms had been a major determinant shaping the style at several stages. Next, the author elaborates upon the era of Raja Dalip Singh (r. 1695-1741) of Guler who made an assortment of artisans inclusive of painters (*chattere*) get domiciled in his kingdom and cater to the courtly circle. To this information culled from the contemporary chronicle *Dalip-ranjani*

(1703), he added the details from the pilgrim registers (*bahi*) in possession of priests in Haridvar confirming the presence of one Kashmiri painter (*musavvar*), Hasnu, the son of Bharathu. The family of Hasnu, once serving at the Mughal workshop, seems to have migrated to Guler in the late 17th century. All the three sons of Hasnu, namely, Seu, Billu (Biland) and Raghu were all actively involved in preparing voluminous series of mythological paintings and royal portraits at their flourishing family guild. Seu, in particular, was a master artist to whom numerous portraits of Raja Dalip Singh and Regent Bishan Singh have been justly attributed. Marked by "a high degree of naturalism", Seu's style was a major advance. His exceptionally talented sons, Manaku (c. 1700-1760) and Nainsukh (c. 1710-1778) shaped the classical style of Guler-Kangra with their innovativeness and technical virtuosity all along their abundantly productive career. Succeeding generation of painters was forced to seek patronage in other hill states. Their movement caused the dispersal of painterly idiom of Guler and emergence of sub-styles in tune with the aesthetic preference of new patrons. The simplified version of this historical account has been presented with befitting selection of images, majority of these being unpublished, illustrating all

the salient aspects encircling courtly culture and the world of the artists.

A preliminary portrait study of Raja Abhiraj Singh of Jaswan, Guler (Pl.56), mis-identified as the portrait of Pandi Seu *musavvar* since long, has been clarified with evidential data (Pls.57, a & b, 58). There is an entire section devoted to the Subject Matter with an elucidation of Krishna Myth against the backdrop of medieval devotionalism and related literary corpus. Equally relevant is the chapter on *Sringara* poetry with the cardinal theme of *nayaka-nayikabheda* or typecasting of ideal heroes (*nayaka*) and heroines (*nayika*). An appendix comprising facsimiles, transliteration and translation of the painters' entries in the record books (*bahi*) kept in the families of priests at pilgrimage cities, will be useful for students. Surprisingly, the author, himself an accomplished painter specializing in Guler-Kangra style, chose to remain absolutely silent on methods and material of the Pahari masters.

Anjan Chakraverty