Chapter-IV

Development of Art Education in Punjab: informal Beginnings
pp147-161
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Very little corroborated reference is available of a specific formal system of training of the traditional artists working in the Panjab Plains in the late mediaeval period yet a system of art training does seem to have been practiced in Panjab Hills as more or less an extension of the Mughal system of art training. In the Mughal court atelier which came to be known as ‘Karkhana’ in the reign of Akbar the master painter was known as ‘Ustad’ and the pupils were referred to as ‘Shagird’ who were given training in the art of painting by him. Akbar had been trained in painting at an early age by the famous Persian master, Khwaja Abd-us-Samad, who was employed by his father, Humayun. Due to his passion for painting Akbar created a large atelier, which he staffed with artists recruited from all parts of

1 “They began their lessons in drawing by practicing circles and spirals on a wooden panel (patti) thoroughly mastered these designs they began to practice in drawing lotus flowers, fish, peacock, deer and all sorts of decorative designs consisting of simple geometrical patterns and more complex floral scrolls and arabesques...After thoroughly mastering these designs the master-painter allowed them to prepare tracing which they pounced on paper, then finishing the outline with brush and filling it with colours. It was in the end when they could wield their brush without break (a qalam me tut na parana) that they were allowed to draw their own composition”.

India\(^2\). The atelier was initially under the superintendence of Akbar’s teacher and another great Persian master, Mīr Sayyid Aīfī. The work of the Mughal atelier in this formative stage was largely confined to the illustration of books. The manuscripts were first written by calligraphers. Blank spaces were left for the illustrations\(^3\).

The rigorous Mughal methodology filtered into the Rajput states of Rajasthan and the Punjab hills. The beginnings of the Rajasthani school of painting are believed to be contemporaneous with those of the popular Mughal idiom, which influenced it in several respects. The early published literature about the art of miniature paintings in the Panjab Hills by B.N Goswamy and on Rajasthani paintings by Karl Khadalawala throw light on the rigorous training given by the master and the trials which the disciple had to undergo. It was a very strict discipline observed in the guru-shishya parampara.

Dr. Goswami refers to the artist Narottam of Mandi in this context. "The relationship of the Guru (preceptor) and

\(^2\) Abul Fazl gives an account of the royal atelier of Akbar in his book Ayin-i-Akbari (1596-1601). It lists many of the texts illustrated in the ‘taswirkhana’. It mentions seventeen painters and throws information on Akbar’s interest in paintings as well as in the painters. There is information regarding the illustrated manuscripts, their date and place of execution and even the name of the scribe. Also we come to know about the distribution of labour between artists, amount of time for the execution and the dates on which they were to be completed.

the code of instruction was austere in the extreme." The rigorous exercises that the Rajput painter would undergo while training were quite similar to that of the disciple in a Mughal atelier (pl-82). Karikhadalawala refers to a chart from Bundi illustrating various sketches that the pupils were supposed to master from the extremely simple to the most complicated, these motifs had to be copied by the artist again till he had acquired a facility with the line and brush. From yet another example of exercise book from Guler in the collection of the Raja that was seen by Dr. Goswami in Haripur, emerges a clearer picture of the relationship of the Guru and the shishya. The author refers to this book to exemplify how the master would point out the specific mistakes in a disciple's work and some amount of liberty was granted later when the student had acquired a satisfactory level. Thus in the initial stages of training, the teacher acted more like a dictator and the principles laid down by the master were 'inviolable' as is evident from the description by the artist Lechman Das of

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5 "In one of the sketches the master has pointed out several mistakes. The scene is of the lifting of Mt. Goverdhan; the master points out that the cows are shown seated; they ought to be standing. At another place he asks the disciple in a note on the sketch that the tribhanga (the 3-fold inflexion of the body in standing) in the figure of Krishna should be more pronounced. The suggestions have significantly been incorporated in the later sketches." Ibid, p.362.
Samloti that the student could not differ “even a ratti” from the instructions of the master⁶.

A unique feature of this discipline was the kind of asceticism that the pupil would cultivate. The pupil was imbued with a spiritual inclination. Every artist had his own “isht” or special deity and when he would sit to work he ‘inevitably worshipped the Devi’. Not only was he desired to have a mastery ‘over his own person’ but also the process of learning in such a discipline which was in a way, a test of pupils’ patience. In the early years he was made to search pigments, grinding colours, ‘chunam’ or preparing brushes for the master and for years he was not allowed to sketch⁷. It is imperative to conclude that in the strict conventions of the past as “…the heredity character of the profession, the rigorous code of practice, the obedience to canons and a general respect for rules, led to the atonement of tradition”⁸. Also Goswami refers to a ‘Family discipline’ which operated like a guild and the secrets of profession were passed from one generation to the next. Thus, in pre colonial India as also Punjab, all arts like painting, modeling, carpentry etc. were taught in the Karkhana or the Gharana. Visual Arts and their practice was specifically in the hands of occupational caste groups.

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⁶ ibid.
⁷ Dr. Goswami refers to artist Narrotam of Mandi who would carry bags of sand from the river bank on his back to his master’s place.
Ibid, p362.
⁸ ibid.
who carried forward their knowledge of arts and crafts from one
generation to the other. Teaching of painting was in no way different
than of wood-carving, sculpture, metal work etc. This customary
pattern of instruction in the visual arts practiced in the pre colonial
imperial workshops in India was found to be unsuitable to act as the
model for institutionalizing the colonial scheme of art instruction in the
late nineteenth century.

The paintings in the Panjab Hills flourished at Kangra, Guler, Nurpur and the artists of these centers created Rajput style of painting under the generous patronage of the hill chiefs but these came under the Sikh rule particularly after the seizure of Kangra in 1809 by Maharaja Ranjit Singh⁹ which inevitably led to the migration of some pahari painters into Panjab plains to find patronage in the court of the Maharaja whose generosity and affluence let the art of painting flourish. Maharaja permitted painters from Delhi and Kangra to settle in Lahore (pl-83). With the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh a new phase was opened in Panjab in the realm of art. The miniature painting done at Lahore, the murals of Amritsar, numerous Sikh portraits and the decoration of the Holy Golden Temple are products of this significant period in the development of the arts (pl. 84-87). As a matter of fact, artists from various parts of the country viz. western Himalayas, Rajasthan and Audh entered the Punjab and spread their style¹⁰ as consequent upon the fall of Delhi Darbar, many

talented artists migrated to Panjab. These artists developed and popularized the miniatures painting style; the examples of which were commonly noticed in the markets of Amritsar and Lahore in the second quarter of the twentieth century (pl-88). The city of Amritsar, at the time of Ranjit Singh was coming up with its havelis, temples, akharas etc. which gave new opportunities to the painters who did naqqashi, moharaqashi and Jaratkari work on many public buildings apart from the Golden Temple along with many other public buildings and revived the tradition of Pahari frescoes in the murals.

The important artists of this period who are believed to have worked in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh were – Kehar Singh (1820-1882), Mohd. Baksh and Purku of Kangra. A major personality that emerges during this period is that of Kehar Singh who in his paintings mostly depicted the domestic life of Punjab and professions viz.- Nihangs, Punjabi women and paintings representing Sikh nobility etc. (pl. 89-91).

Whereas, Amritsar developed into a major city under Ranjit Singh himself, the city of Lahore had its old, medieval Mughal culture which had fallen into decay by the time Ranjit Singh

12 W.G Archer mentions in his “Painting of the Sikhs” that Kehar Singh was an adept at various techniques of graphic art. K.C Aryan refers to his expertise in painting on glass in his book “Punjab Painting”. According to Dr. Harinder Singh Roop he was given the commission of painting frescos on the walls of Lahore Fort and was also responsible for painting murals on the walls of Shri Hari Mandir Sahib, Akal Takht and on the Memorial of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
came on the scene yet the most prominent among the centers of miniature painting was established at Lahore. In the reign of Ranjit Singh from (A.D 1799-1839) art gradually “...began to acquire a patronage and prestige that it had lost during the preceding century. It was now that the process was initiated where by the traditionally and securely held concept and approaches to painting began to adjust themselves to new needs and demands created by marked European presence in the court of Ranjit Singh: generals, visitors, artists”13. Bastien Felix Feuillet de Conches, a 19th century French Baron and collector of La Fontaine’s Fables sent to Lahore several copies of a French edition of La Fontaine’s Fables through Jean-Francois Allard, a French General employed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. These were to be illustrated by an Indian painter. The work was assigned to Imam Bakhsh, and the work continued under the care of another French general, Ventura, after the death of Allard (pl-92). General Ventura also had the French Fables roughly interpreted in Persian for the benefit of Imam Bakhsh14.

Thus it was in the court of Ranjit Singh that the native painter first encountered the “entirely new set of artistic

14 “Once finished, the paintings travelled back to France, were greatly admired by Feuillet, and became a valued part of his family's possession till his death”. Goswami, B.N, “Between Paris & Lahore”, The Tribune, Sunday, February 12, 2006.
principles. Two notable artists Jeevan Ram\textsuperscript{15} and Hasan-Al-Din of the entourage of Lord William Bentick began using the medium of oil-painting as early as 1830's. There are numerous miniature paintings showing the camp and court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. One such painting attributed to artist Jivan Ram is the famous portrait of Ochterlony smoking a hookah while watching a nautch at his residence\textsuperscript{16}. He is the most important artist in the present stage of our knowledge to have made Panjab aware of oils (plates 93A-93B).

After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the art activity in the court received a sudden blow and it was not until 1841 when Sher Singh became the 'Maharaja' that the art of painting gained a new prestige as "...his strong desire to mix with the British people, encouraged the progress of painting"\textsuperscript{17}. In his ‘Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh’ Osborne produced several sketches of Maharaja Sher Singh (pl-94). Emily Eden also made sketch of Maharaja Sher Singh \textsuperscript{18}. It was through the works of these European

\textsuperscript{15} The first published portrait of Maharaja Ranjit Singh that was also used by Princep as the frontispiece to his book, "History of the Punjab and of the rise, progress and present condition of the sect and nation of the Sikhs" in 1834 was done by the Delhi artist Jeevan Ram.

\textsuperscript{16} This painting is now in the Victoria Memorial in Kolkata. William Fraser, the then British Resident was a lover of Delhi painters.


\textsuperscript{18} The drawing was later published in Emily Eden’s book, ‘Portraits of The Princes and Peoples of India’. This was the first of the sketches and reflected the real character of Sher Singh.
artists that the native artist came under the spell of European academic art and began to incorporate its elements in his own works (pl-95). Another Theodore Schoefft a competent portraitist, landscapists and history painter reached Lahore around 1840 (pl-96). The German court physician Honigberger had brought him to the court of Sher Singh as the King had demanded so. Before he got the commission for painting portraits of the Maharaja and other important personalities of the Sikh court he made a portrait sketch of Bhai Gurmukh Singh19 in order to prove his skill. He was also asked to sketch a view of ‘Darbar’. The artist made large oil-paintings in Lahore and Sher Singh was much impressed with his work20. Among the European artists mentioned before there were others who also contributed significantly to the genre of Sikh art, such as William Carpenter, Franz Xavier, Winter Balter, William Simpson etc21.

The works by the European artists in the typical academic-realistic manner and marked Chiaroscuro defined entirely new stylistic directions for the native Punjabi artist. To them this experience of realistic pictures and on such a large format was overwhelming. Gradually there was evolved a hybrid style of painting by the native artists. That this new stylistic denominator was gradually being inseminated into the Punjabi artist’s creativity is clear from certain portrait sketches available from this period. On certain occasions the native court artists were sent to paint portraits of the royal guests as a kind of record and artists attached to the court were

19 One of the principal Sikh priests.
generally occupied with the sketching in order to prepare the portraits of the subject. Later the artist used to make the water-colour painting from the initial sketch. In fact there was the style that dominated the painting in the Sikh court. No doubt this style was derived in one hand from the works of Theodore Soefft and the lithographic drawings in miniature format by Emily Eden published in her book ‘Portraits of Princes and Peoples of India’ at least to some extent (pl-97). These drawings had a profound effect on the native artists as is noticeable in the example of a painting of Ranjit Singh by a Guler artist copied after the sketch of Emily Eden with an exception of the representation of the right side of the face in order to hide the blind eye of the Maharaja. Also the beginning of experimentation on comparatively larger format by the artists was another European influence (pl-98).

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22 Von Orlich, the German visitor to the court of Sher Singh while mentioning a certain occasion around 1843 in the court says, “On occasions of this kind, it is customary for the Indian nobles to bring the artist attached to the court, to make the portraits of those present; the painter of Sher Singh was therefore incessantly occupied in sketching with a black lead pencil those likenesses which were later to be copied in water-colour, in order that they might adorn the walls of the royal palace; and some of them were admirably executed. I was among the honored few and the artist was very particular in making a faithful representation of my uniform and my hat and feathers”.

Orlich, Leopold Von, Travels in India Including Sinde and the Punjab, Translated from the German. First published 1845. Reprint, New Delhi, AES, 1999, 206-207.

23 Paul, Suwarcha, op. cit, p18.
After the fall of the Lahore court, artists began to migrate to other princely states. The earliest of these artists who had migrated to Kapurthala was Bhai Kishan Singh who had excellence in painting drawings of birds, figures and architectural sketches in water-colour (plates 99A-99B). He was an adept at drawing. Maharaja Jagatjit Singh of Kapurthala patronized a number of artists; not only local but European also. The European artists were quite extensively commissioned to work in his court particularly for the purpose of painting portraits of the Maharaja and other members of the royal

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24 On March 29, 1849, the British occupied Lahore and the Punjab was formally proclaimed part of the British Empire in India.

25 Artist Bishan Singh and Kishan Singh were the descendants of Kehar Singh about whom Baden Powell refers in his “Hand Book of The Manufactures and Arts of The Punjab” published in 1872 mentions that both these artists participated in the Great Exhibition of 1864. Referring to their works he writes that their works “in the collection showed a real endeavor to draw things as they are”. Bishan Singh exhibited no less than ten paintings out of which three were of considerable size and of great merit. The subject-matter of these were the Durbar of the Maharja Ranjit Singh, Maharaja Sher Singh and Municipal Committee of Amritsar. Baden Powell further describes that the perspective of the building as incorrect though the drawing was admirable. He also refers to the series of six pictures representing the shawl trade. This series included the following pictures:

1) The Shawl Weaver
2) Cleaner
3) Darner and Piece Joiner
4) Presser
5) Wool Washer and
6) Dyer
family. R.P Srivastava mentions Kapur Singh who was assigned the job of fanning the British painters who were commissioned to paint in the court of Kapurthala. He observed these artists very closely and became a painter later. Jagatjit Singh had made a good collection of paintings of Indian as well as European artists.

Significant artistic activity flourished in the state of Patiala during the rule of Raja Narinder Singh and it emerged as an important center of artistic activity be it music, architecture, literature or painting. The large collection of sketches depicting flora and fauna, head studies, portraits of Maharajas and architectural elements etc. exhibit the influence of European naturalism. Also the...

26 For further detail on Kapur Singh see p175.
27 This collection includes the works of Punjab artists namely Lahora Singh of Lahore, S.C.S Sohal, and Tarlok Singh, B.C Sanyal from Calcutta and an artist from Bombay S. Fernandiz and the famous Raja Ravi Verma as well. Among the European artists represented in the collection of Maharaja are Vereker and Lilian Hamilton, P. Tenyson Cole (1916-1918), Marcel Baschet, Jules Cayron and Van Dyk. The study of examples of paintings by the local artists in this collection proves that the academic style of painting of the European artists had a strong impact over the style, subject-matter and medium of native artists resulting in the assimilation of this realistic style in his work. It is noteworthy that the artists were also often provided with the photographic prints of the subject for making a portrait in oils.

F.NO.M/3-44-30, Basta NO.151, Kapurthala, -PSA, Patiala.

28 That the state of Patiala others, not only patronized the Punjabi artists but also artists from Bombay and Calcutta further strengthens the pan-Indian approach of the patrons. The Patiala collection of paintings includes the works by Ukil brothers, Y. Suharao, M.G Sampat, M. Verappa, M.V Dhurrandhar, L.N Taskar, V.R Muli, H.K Bedekar, M.A Joshi, Atul Bose and Mazumdar. Among the Punjabi artists...
state extended scholarships to the students of art to artists like Abdul Rahman, Madan Lal and Jasmohan Lal on record received scholarships from the state in order to study at the Mayo School of Art, Lahore. Like Kapurthala and Patiala the state of Faridkot also patronized artists both Indian and European. Thus the art scene in these more important princely states viz.—Kapurthala, Patiala and Faridkot or others namely Nabha, Jind and Malerkotla was more or less the same.

With the annexation of Punjab a new chapter began in the history of Punjab as all aspects of life political, social and cultural acquired a new face and meaning as the old values were who are represented by their work in this collection include—Sobha Singh, M.A Aziz, R.L Malhotra, Mira Baksh, Allah Baksh, S.G Thakur Singh and Tarlok Singh. For further detail on the works in this collection see Grewal, J, Oil Painting in Punjab, Circa 1840 A.D to Circa 1930 A.D, unpublished PhD dissertation, Panjab University, 2003.

\(^{29}\) F. No. 403, B. No. 10, Sub Head-Budget, Head Finance, Patiala state, PSA, Patiala.

\(^{30}\) Also see – F. No. ES-186-1995, Head Edu, Patiala State, PSA, Patiala.

\(^{30}\) W.E Soloman, A.E Harris and Fritz, a German were employed by the Faridkot darbar in order to paint portraits. Soloman was commissioned to paint the portrait of Prince Harjinder Singh in 1921 and A.E Harris was employed to paint a number of portraits of the Late Maharaja Brijinder Singh. Besides the Indian artists who got commissions for painting portraits in Faridkot were Pestonjee Bomanjee, S.K. Deen and the Punjabi artist Joginder Singh who mainly painted themes of Sikh religion particularly the life of Gurus. W.E Soloman was the Principal of the School of Art in Bombay.
redened. Similarly in the field of art, "...the barely felt changes initiated in the first half of the century began to acquire a clear, definable shape. Oil paints became popular medium and were employed extensively for portraits by Panjabi painters. Raja Ravi Verma, the much acclaimed Indian artist who had adopted the medium of oil-painting, visited Lahore in 1887. Also Bamapada Banerjee who was a student of the Calcutta School of Art became popular in north India about 1880's particularly due to the oleographs and mythological paintings. He probably visited Punjab between 1881-83 and painted several portraits of the people of Bengali community settled in Punjab.

We learn that there were European artists patronized in almost all these states and side by side worked the native Punjabi artists who were apparently influenced by the style of their counterparts due to constant interaction among them. The native artists gradually learnt to represent the visual experience, understood the principles of perspective and foreshortening and grasped the essentials of rendering a three dimensional form. They learnt the techniques of oil painting and water-colour, primarily by observing the European artists who were patronized by the royal families. Therefore, this process of informal education of the Punjabi artist in a

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31 The successors of Maharaja Ranjit Singh fought four important wars with the British in 1845-46 in Mudki, (19th Dec.), Ferozeshahr (21st Dec.), Baddowal (21st Jan) and Sabraon (10th Feb). British finally occupied Lahore and annexed Punjab in 1849.


32 Kessar, Urmi, 2003, op. cit, p119-120. (Also see- Tapti, G.T, pp 75-77).
more indirect way did help him to a great extent in grasping the values and principles of the academic art much before the beginning of an institutionalized art training in the manner of the West in Punjab. However, outside the court, another movement that was underway was the influence of popular pictures on the works of the Punjab artists. For example, the illustrations from 'The Illustrated News London' and 'Graphic' could very comfortably be covering the walls of the shops in the towns. Also there could be seen German lithographs, portraits of the Queen and the Royal family, pictures of Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race hanging or stuck along with the picture of Lord Krishna or Kali which is an indication of the process of acceptance and assimilation of European sensibility in the mind of the contemporary Punjabi artists³⁹.

³⁹ Kipling, J. L., "Beast And Man In India", New Delhi, 1940, p340.