

Review:

THE PAHARI SCHOOL OF PAINTING

PAHARI PAINTINGS AND SIKH PORTRAITS IN THE LAHORE MUSEUM, by F. S. Aijazuddin. (Sotheby Parke Bernet, London and New York. Price: £25 plus £1 postage; U.S. \$ 57.00 Plus \$ 1.15 postage).

Scholarly, fascinating and sumptuous, F. S. Aijazuddin's treatise on Pahari paintings and Sikh portraits invites enthusiastic attentions both of serious student of the subject as well as the casual connoisseur. Essentially, an analytical and descriptive catalogue of the paintings of the period now preserved in the biggest and the oldest art-repository of Pakistan, the Lahore Museum, the book describes in a very lively manner more than 500 paintings on the pattern set up by its predecessor, *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, by one of the leading authorities on the subject, Dr. W. G. Archer published some five years ago.

One of the most important art-traditions introduced in the subcontinent by the Moghul emperors was the art of miniature and portrait painting. Brought from Iran by one of the illustrious scions of the dynasty, the emperor Humayun, it was like-wise patronized by his successors, emperors Akbar, Jahāngīr, Shāh Jahān and others. The imperial courts created art-academies and ateliers where a host of artists and calligraphists remained actively busy in creating masterpieces. The practice was followed by the enlightened courtiers and elite of the society who in turn patronized artists and kept them in their service. The result of this enthusiastic enterprise was the creation and accumulation of a wealth of illustrated manuscripts of Persian classics and portrait paintings of the emperors, princes, important courtiers etc. to be prized highly and placed proudly in their personal libraries in the shape of albums.

The art-tradition was followed and patronized by other royal connoisseurs, rulers and chieftains throughout the subcontinent. Of our special interest for the purpose of the present study, are the rulers and chieftains of some Rajpur states located at the foothills of the Himalayas, mainly at Basohli, Chamba, Garhwal, Guler, Kangra, Mandi, Nurpur, Sukhet, etc. Among the galaxy of these petty states, those of Garhwal, Guler and Kangra became more prominent in the imitation of

the style and producing large number of the specimens. It has been recorded that in 1658 a Moghul prince alongwith his two retainer-artists flew from the court of emperor Aurangzeb and took refuge at the state of Grahwal. Later on, the prince left the court but the painters stayed behind to introduce the Moghul traditions of the art of painting. It has been argued that they were successful in giving a new vigour to the art of paintings in that far-off located hill-state, a style only equalled in romantic charm by that produced at Kangra. In this respect, 'Garhwal made one of the greatest contribution of Indian Painting'.

Similarly, at Kangra the art received a new stimulus under the dynamic patronage of its great ruler, Sansar Chand (1775-1823) where again some painters from the plains were responsible to introduce and perpetuate a new style having individuality, imagination and local tradition. The refined feminine imagery composed of rhythmically curved lines and expressive sensuality set in natural circumstances of lush green and undulating hills, silvery streams, and flowering trees seem to be the chief characteristics of the style.

Following the fashion of the earlier phase of the Moghul art, these Rajput rulers also requisitioned the services of master-artists to illustrate the text of classical works on socio-religious subjects. We find, for instance, painters busy at Kangra, illustrating *the Bhagavata Purana*, *the Hamir Hath*, *the Sat Sai* etc. being illustrated by these painters for these royal enthusiasts.

Unfortunately, these treasures were dispersed and fell apart with the decline and fall of these petty states; a greater number were destroyed while some found their way to the collections of art galleries and museums all over the world. The Lahore Museum was fortunate enough to possess a good number of them collected during the twenties and thirties of the present century. The famous catalogue of paintings by S. N. Gupta published in 1922, included brief description of some selected items from this collection. Though inadequate and brief, it remained the only reference to the collection for scholars for well over half a century when Mr. F. S. Aijazuddin, took up the stupendous task of arranging, classifying and then describing the whole collection afresh. The result of his 'labour of love' inspire with his erudite scholarship was his *Pahari Paintings and Sikh Portraits in the Lahore Museum*. The book is undoubtedly a piece of serious research of outstanding merit, more than a descriptive and analytical catalogue of paintings as it surveys and analyses salient features of Pahari School of Paintings and circumstances and justification for its birth, evolution and climax, and its rightful place in

history when he aptly remarks: "Without the Pahari Painter, the Pahari states and their rulers might well have been forgotten; without the Pahari rajas, the painters would certainly have been forgotten."

While the introduction outlines history of the formation and establishment of the museum and its collection of paintings, it also includes some 40 odd paintings of the Lahore Museum now preserved in the National Museum of Pakistan. This shows the meticulous handling of the subject by the author who tries his utmost to make the story as complete as possible. The last portion of the catalogue deals with portraits from the period of Sikh rule from 1840 to 1850. They are in fact a continuation of the Pahari tradition, with almost the same families of painters working at Lahore.

The catalogue has been arranged province-wise. Every section has an introduction outlining the socio-political history of the state followed by exhaustive discussion on each painting. In this way, more than five hundred paintings of the Pahari style and Sikh portraits have been discussed, analysed and illustrated, 259 in black and white, and 16 in colour. The value of the book is enhanced with an exhaustive introduction and upto date documentation in the shape of foot-notes, bibliographies, concordance, indices etc. all 'written in unimpeachable English and with a vivid clarity and ease.'

These features make the book a work of outstanding nature, indispensable for the specialist and most enjoyable for the connoisseur and that a Pakistani scholar like Mr. Aijazuddin would have accomplished it, is all the more commendable. It is perhaps the first book of its kind on the subject by a Pakistani specialist written so masterly and printed so sumptuously, for which the author deserves congratulations.

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