Chapter Six

STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Miniatures: The evidence from the monastic establishments discussed here is not very extensive as far as miniature painting is concerned. As we have seen, this may be due partly to the fact that much of the evidence has been destroyed or has disappeared, and partly to the fact that the activity here mostly took the form of mural painting. The reasons for that are fairly easy to determine: if painting was to produce an impact on the devotees and visitors to the place, then it should be out in the open, for everyone to see. And quite obviously, the impact made by murals painted on the walls of important buildings like temples would be much greater than if painting took the shape of small miniatures which were meant to be kept tucked away in cloth bundles to be taken out only from time to time for inspection or for showing to important visitors from outside. One cannot be certain about this, but it is not unlikely that the mahants favoured paintings on the walls more than painting in the form of miniatures. The latter might have been collected, or might have been received as presents or gifts from important visitors and devotees, especially the rulers of
the hills. The manner in which a group of paintings were presented to the mahant of Dharamsal, as recorded by R.B. Daya Ram Sahni, is indicative of how this might have happened in the past also. Important rulers like those of Mankot or Bandrafta or Nurpur or Guler or Jaswan, all belonging to states which we associate with active and important work in the area of Pahari painting, could well have done the same much before the end of the 19th century.

But here one is in an area of speculation.

The most important group of miniatures which can be connected clearly with one of the establishments, that at Bathu, is in a style that can be taken to be peculiar and unique. It is different from anything seen in the Pahari areas, and different, of course, from anything that one notices from the Punjab plains. The evidence of the style of painting at Bathu has, once again, much to one's regret become dispersed and one has to work only with very limited examples, some of which are reproduced here. But the style of the paintings is clearly worth looking at more closely. At first sight, one may be inclined to treat


2 Such a supposition could be correct, since the rulers of these states were staunch Vaishnava devotees. See, for further reference, Goswamy & Grewal, The Mughal and Sikh rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori, p.8.
them lightly and regard them as "folkish" works not
deserving of very serious attention. But the work has its
own kind of strength and vitality. The early date of the
paintings could perhaps be taken for granted. We have
discussed in some measure the style of the pictures earlier,
and eliminated the possibility that these could be 18th
century paintings, contemporary to Raja Govardhan Chand of
Guler whose "alleged" portrait appears in one of these
paintings as paying homage to Narainji (Pl. 32). The
possibility that these are works belonging to the third
quarter of the 17th century, perhaps close to 1670 or so,
is really strong. The early look is sustained by two or
three factors present in the paintings themselves. The
manner in which the painter makes subsidiary figures cut
into the margins of the paintings in almost all the works1
from this group, and was in which there is a great deal of
simplification not only of individual forms but of the
backgrounds which are mostly eliminated are all strongly
suggestive. The treatment of the eyes and of the hands,
again makes us come quite close to the period we are
speaking of; at the most one could stretch the date to the
last quarter of the 17th century. But, possibly, no further.

1 Cf. Archer, Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills, Arki,
Pl. 14, (Plates), p. 7; Mandi, Pl. 29 (Plates, p. 270).
The painter whom unfortunately we do not know, seems to make a clear attempt at focusing on the intensity of feeling between the two principal figures that we noted in the National Museum double-portrait with Huzuri Shyam (Pl. 30) in attendance at the left. I think he succeeds very well in capturing the maturity and wisdom of Bhagwanji seated on the left, and contrasted with a more active and resolute nature of Narainji whom we do know to be a man of indomitable will, a "mauni" saddhu. The manner in which he makes the figure of Narainji tilt his head heavenwards and have his gaze fixed on nothing in particular, is quite suggestive of this. The painter uses, quite clearly, hieratic scaling, for in this very painting the figures of the attendants become much smaller even though they are on the same plane than the figures of the two principal personages. His treatment of the hands is quite unusual, for they are not only flat and spatula-like but somewhat elongated, a feature we notice in all the four paintings that we are reproducing here. There is a tendency towards providing decorative detail in the dresses, or to an extent on the carpet and in the foreground. In a small measure, there is, alike in the dryness of the colouring and in some of the patterns, some faint suggestion of a Malwa influence.

1 Cf. Archer, W.G. *Indian miniatures*, Pl. 34.
in the paintings. But nothing can be said with certainty.

In the painting showing "Raja Dalip Singh" (Pl. 31), we see the use of hieratic scaling once again. The ruler at the left appears to be even larger than Bhagwanji and Narainji, seated this time under a canopy. The attempt to focus on him comes off in this painting as much as in the painting showing "Govardhan Chand of Guler". This, because the painter in this series has probably already established the figures of Bhagwanji and Narainji, fixed them in the mind of the viewer, and then proceeds to give further details of what happened at their "Courts".

A special attempt has been made by the painter to portray the passing of time in the picture showing Narainji seated alone under a canopy with the Mughal prince in attendance (Pl. 32). It is not usual, in a series, to find a painter showing progress in time. But here Narainji is shown with a grey beard. The likelihood then may be that the painter was trying to focus on this figure when Bhagwanji was not living any more and was probably painting this picture contemporaneously with the introduction of the royal figure at the bottom left, probably from imagination. The colouring of these paintings is deserving of mention. There is a uniform dryness in the palette. The range of colours is not very extensive either. But the choice of the colours is subdued and attractive,
the blues and the pinks being relatively soft. The flesh
tint in the bodies of the painted figures is somewhat
dark, salmon pinks having been preferred by the artist.
The painter does not lay too much of emphasis on depicting
the horizon which he does only in the case of the National
Museum\(^1\) double-portrait. There, too, it is reduced only to
a line towards the top of the painting. In the other two
paintings, the horizon is resolutely left out.

Naïve and direct as these pictures might be
called, we get a continuation of the same feeling in three
other paintings, two of which provide the name of the
painter: Gurbaksh. Dr. Archer,\(^2\) after examining other
paintings from the Nurpur area, places the picture of
"the two Gosains" (Pl.39), in Nurpur. The inscription on
the painting does not state the place, and mentions only
the name of the patron, Shri Shakat Chand, whose "Chākar"
the painter Gurbaksh makes himself out to be. Dr. Archer's
reason for placing these paintings in Nurpur is their
resemblence with pictures of Raja Tegh Chand of Kangra out

\(^1\) National Museum, No. 69.19.

\(^2\) See, \textit{Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills}, p.397(Text),
Pl.21.
in the forest hunting\(^1\), or sitting on a carpet\(^2\) with a small group of people. The matter is, however, not entirely beyond doubt considering that even Tegh Chand is not a ruler of Nurpur and there is no necessary association between his portraits and the state of Nurpur. It would have been considerably simple if it were possible to identify the patron, Shakat Chand. The name has a 'Katoch' air to it, but we do not know of any Shakat Chand, however, from Bilaspur\(^3\) that we know of. The prince was a son of Raja Ajmer Chand of Bilaspur who himself was a devout Vaishnava, and the possibility of his son being not only a Vaishnava but a devotee of the Pindori-darbar cannot be ruled out. But, once again, we are on very uncertain ground.

It is the style of the paintings by Gurbaksh which is of interest to us primarily here. Gurbaksh is obviously not a painter of great merit and would not fit into a discussion of the best work done either for the Pindori darbar or in the Pahari areas. But there is a certain charm about his work. The technical skill is quite negligible; the harsh modelling of faces, the problems he has

\(^1\) Cf. Archer, Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills, (Text), Nurpur, p.396 (Text), Pl.19.
\(^2\) Cf. Ibid., p.397 (Text), Pl.22.
\(^3\) Ibid., Bilaspur, (Text), p.224.
when it comes rendering the anatomy accurately, the manner in which the plains of the figures becomes awkward at places, affects his style in general. But, in the double-portrait in the Chandigarh Museum, where we see Narainji seated facing Bhagwanji, offering him homage by folding his hands and holding a lotus flower indicating reverence, the relationship between the two is fairly well established. Curiously, Bhagwanji appears to be even younger than Narainji here. Here, the painter seems to be suggesting possibly the agelessness of Bhagwanji, something that the tradition at Pindori and Daulthal insists upon, for it gives him an unusually long span of life. But it is not an accurate representation of either of the two figures that Gurbaksh is really interested in. He is keen on capturing the feeling and in this he succeeds. Contrasted with the general simplicity of the compositions, Gurbaksh focuses considerably on minor details which he tends to turn decorative. One notices, thus, the treatment of the long flower garlands worn alike by Bhagwanji and Narainji in this painting, as also the way in which he goes into minute

1 Chandigarh Museum, No.230.

2 Ref. to in, Goswamy & Grewal, *The Mughal and Sikh rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori*, p.5.
details of the pearl necklaces or the strand of pearls which appear all over the conical caps topped with the chhatras worn by the two personages. The manner in which he ties little flower chaplets around the projections of the conical caps is quite peculiar to Gurbaksh. The ground is left bare, but a strand of pearls towards the top is provided to give it a rich and decorative effect.

He does not do anything of the kind in the simpler portrait of "Sukhdev" mahant (Pl.40). The composition is even simpler here. There is only a rim towards the top creating an arch. Mahant Sukhdev, wearing prominently the Vaishnava tilak, but a cap which is shorter than the caps worn by Bhagwanji and Narainji, sits against a bolster. The way in which his left hand, rounded like a fist, is treated speaks of the difficulties Gurbaksh had in drawing. The modelling of the face is again somewhat hard and the figure of the attendant waving a morchhal over the head of the mahant has a measure of stiffness about itself. The only decorative element in the painting is the little flowered design on the jama worn both by the mahant and the attendant. Beyond this, it remains a simple and direct portrait of a person whom Gurbaksh might well have seen himself.
Working from the double-portrait in the Chandigarh Museum of Bhagwanji and Narainji by Gurbaksh, one could possibly see the portrait of Bhagwanji and Narainji as two bodies in one, earlier reproduced by Mr. Khandalvala and Dr. Karuna Goswamy, as being also the work of Gurbaksh. This, however, is a more ambitious picture than the Chandigarh Museum painting. For one thing, the painter shows the two figures seated under a tree which is very highly stylized, but undoubtedly attractive (Pl. 42). On either side of the seated figures are cypress trees, once again very stylized and turned tapering towards the top in the direction of the centre of the painting. The sky is introduced and little dabs of paint are put in to indicate some kinds of clouds; also, the painter provides a striped carpet on the ground. All this is consistent with his decorative tendency when it comes to the rendering of jewellery, the design of the jama, or the little strands of flowers which are hung by him upon the tree in the middle.

1 National Museum, No. 47.110/338.
2 P.M.P., p. 101, Fig. 27.
In terms of shear handling, this is a more successful picture, for the modelling is a little softer and the general rendering of the two bodies, joined together, is not awkward. The innocence of this kind of work is easily communicated to the viewer. And this possibly is the most noticeable thing about the style that Gurbaksh worked in. The date given to these paintings by Dr. Archer, C.1740 to 1750, is perhaps entirely right. Neither Gurbaksh nor Shakat Chand, his patron, are known to us from any other documents. But the paintings are not of the 17th century, like those of Bathu. And even though it is difficult to place a folkish style like this accurately, the middle of the 18th century may come very close to describing their style in general.

Possibly on the same date, but in a style which is only reminiscent of that of Gurbaksh, while being somewhat distinct from it, there is another group of three miniatures which we cannot give to any known style of painting in the plains. One of these, from the Alice Boner collection, is the most elaborate of the group(Pl.34).

1 Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills, (Text), Pl.21, p. 397.

2 This miniature is published in Robert Skelton, Indian Miniatures from the Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries, pp.183-184, Pl.68.
Here we see Bhagwanji and Narainji seated facing each other, but at a slight distance on the same floral carpet which, in turn, is placed on a striped shatranji or carpet. Behind both of them, there are chauri-bearing attendants, the one at right having a yak tail fly-whisk and the one at left holding a morchhal. The style can, in general terms, be characterised as dry, even though the rendering of the face of Bhagwanji has a naturalistic air which distinguishes it from the treatment of Gurbaksh. What is noticeable prominently in these paintings, especially in the Boner collection, is the excessive elongation of the standing figures on the either side. This is a feature which Dr. Archer sees as belonging to a large number of paintings from Nurpur. The presumption that many of the paintings from Pindori and Damthal could be from the Nurpur centre of painting in the hills, may generally be valid. But exact parallels to this style in Nurpur are still wanting.

1 Cf. Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills, p.397, Pl.22. While discussing the characteristics of Nurpur, painting, Dr. Archer stresses the continuing elongation of the figures which is evident in the paintings of the same school, nos.19 and 23, in particular in the portrait of "Young Raja Tegh Chand of Kangra" (See, Nurpur Pl.No.22).
A painting of an unidentified mahant (Pl.45), holding a lotus flower, in the collection of the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba, is also apparently stylistically close to the Boner painting, especially when one notices the tall figure waving a chauri above the head of the mahant. The composition is again quite simple, with the lower one third of the painting occupied by the terrace which has a marble balustrade behind it and on which is spread a carpet with a floral margin. The sky is defined very simply towards the top by a rim above which some indistinct clouds appear. But the treatment of the eyes in this is a little more stylized, and closer to the eye treatment of Narainji's figure in the Boner collection. The impression that this is a folkish product is strong, both from the colouring as also the general quality of drawing in the painting which is not very articulate but aims at stating a thing quickly and directly. Especially noticeable in this painting is the relative shortness of the left arm of the mahant. This is something that we notice in a third painting (Pl.44) which is now in the National Museum. The composition is exactly similar to the one of a mahant in the Chamba Museum. There is a small terrace, the lower one-third of the total picture being occupied by it. And on it, against a bolster, sits a mahant also wearing a long, and

1 National Museum, No.71.96.
discernible Vaishnava tilak mark on the forehead, and holding a lotus flower in the hand. The conical cap on the head is somewhat different, but the flower garland, as also the general feeling of decoration in the strand of pearls and necklaces worn by the figure, is very much the same. Also quite similar to this is the jewellery worn by the attendant figure at the back, who is somewhat stouter than the attendant figure in the Chamba Museum portrait but whose cap is more reminiscent of the conical cap worn by the principal figure of the mahant in the Chamba painting. The feeling of attenuation is somewhat less because of the relative heaviness of the body of the attendant, but the manner in which the fly-whisk is held and the details in which the morchhal has been worked out, are exactly similar. The shortness of the arm and the very heavy rendering of the left hand are again very close to the Chamba picture. The sky is very much towards the top of the painting. There is very little doubt that these two paintings are stylistically connected. Not being able to place them securely in another area of Pahari painting, it would not come as a surprise if these three paintings, like the Bathu paintings, are also the native product of an establishment of the Vaishnavas.

When we move to the better-known group of miniatures from the Pindori establishment themes, we are getting closer to well-known centres of painting. The
familiar scene of the ordeal of liquor which was reproduced by Mr. Khandalavala for the first time is repeated in another miniature (Pl. 36) also in the National Museum, though it was acquired at a different time. Dr. Archer has placed the painting from the Treasurywala collection (Pl. 35) in the National Museum in Nurpur and gives it the date of between A.D. 1680 and 1700. Reckoning from this, one could also place the other painting in the same period perhaps. But I am inclined to place these two splendid pictures in the Mankot group rather than in the Nurpur group of paintings from the hills. There is nothing intrinsically unlikely about Mankot being involved with a subject matter such as this, because rulers of Mankot are known to have been devotees of the Pindori and the Damthal shrines. And when one compares certain details, such as the face of the attendant at the extreme

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1 P.M.P., p.100, Pl.8

2 National Museum, Nos.47.110/359, and 49.19/125.

3 First published in Indian Miniatures, Pl.71, Nurpur A.D.1710. also recently published in Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills, p.302, Nurpur, Pl.2.

4 See, Goswamy & Grewal, The Mughal and Sikh rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori, p.8.
left waving the yak tail fly-whisk over the head of the bearded Jahangir, we come very close to a figure such as the one shown on either side of the blind Raja Sital Dev of Mankot. Likewise, the person administering the liquor or poison to Narainji in the middle of this painting is not very far from the attendant figures in such portraits as those of Raja Dhota Dev of Mankot or even the portrait of Raja Tedhi Singh of Mankot, both reproduced by Dr. Archer. The degree of stylization in these paintings is considerable, but the colouring with its strength is indicative of an early date and it is not unlikely that these paintings go back to about 1670 or 1675. At this time, Mankot was undoubtedly active as a centre of painting, apart from Nurpur. In any case the argument in favour of these being placed in Nurpur alone is not very strong.

An unusually good painting which we have noticed before, that representing mahant Anandghan of Pindori (Pl. 41) was recently added to the collection of the Himachal State Museum at Simla. The extremely fine execution of the figures which are in their own way stylized, the

1 Cf. Archer, Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills, Mankot, Pl. 3, p. 284.

2 Ibid, Pl. 11, p. 286.

3 Ibid, Mankot, Pl. 13, p. 287.
strong colouring specially the beautiful sage-green background and the tremendous control of the line shown by the painter, place this work in a category apart. The general feeling here too is that this is a painting possibly from Mankot. But if the other two paintings are seen to belong to Nurpur, then this may also go to that area. The entire matter is somewhat open and at this point one can only state that the quality of these three paintings makes it a great pleasure to regard them. One only wishes that more had been known about whether these came originally from the collection of the manants of the Pindori or Damthal or whether these were executed at a centre in the hills.

A painting to which Dr. Karuna Goswami\(^1\) has drawn attention, a work of very considerable beauty, is in the Chandigarh Museum\(^2\) and has been noticed briefly before (Pl.38). This again has that strength of design and control of line which makes it an altogether superior work. The stylized figures of the attendants as also of the two musicians at the extreme right, together with the stylization and the treatment of the tree at the right and the striped carpet on the ground, give it a very early look

\(^1\) "Vaishnavism in the Panjab Hills and Pahari Painting", pp.189-190.

\(^2\) Chandigarh Museum, No.1228.
also possibly of the late 17th century. Dr. Karuna Goswamy has pointed to a physical resemblance between the figure of Bhagwanji here in this painting and that of a portrait which she believes to be that of Raja Mahipat Dev of Mankot. The resemblance is easily seen and through this it may not be difficult to place this particular painting in the Mankot group. An unusual feature of this painting is the collage effect in the repousse surfaces of the six-legged throne on the ground and the canopy above, and also in the conical caps worn by the two mahants. The surface thus acquires a texture, a richness which several other paintings of this theme from Mankot and Pindori do not possess.

The two paintings that have clear Nurpur affiliations because of the fact that they come from the collection of the wazir family, are of much later date than the 'ordeal by liqor' painting of the National Museum. But their style is clearly of the 18th century, and that too somewhat late in the century. The 'ordeal by liqor' picture out of these two (Pl. 47), that bearing number 631.75, 

Vaishnavism in the Panjab Hills and Pohori Painting

1. Chandigarh Museum, pp.190-191. The portrait is in the collection of the Chandigarh Museum and bears number 1194.

2. These paintings are in the National Museum and bear numbers B.609-75,631.75.
has a mature, Kangra look to itself. The figure of the Emperor here, up in the balcony window, as noticed before, does not resemble Jahangir at all and comes closer to the figure of Shahjahan if anything. But the face of the begum seated by his side, and the general treatment of the Mughal style architecture as we have noticed in this painting, together with the two-thirds face of the attendant who is serving Narainji with the cup of strong liquor, all give this a third-quarter of the 18th century air. The workmanship is not quite as fine as one notices in Guler paintings of this date. But there is a feeling of refinement. The handling of the area of the pavilion below is somewhat inadequate, for the background wall, with its stylized vessels painted inside niches, comes a little too close to the plane of the painting and the highly stylized tree with four cypresses sticking out from behind it just beyond the latticed balcony on top keep us from giving this work the general status one accords to refined

1 See, Archer, Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills, Kangra, (Plates) - 53(iii), p.223.


paintings of the Guler-Kangra style of this date. But the work is by no means insignificant as an achievement.

Of a piece with this is the burnt fragment showing Bhagwanji and Narainji, joined together, sitting on a lotus flower and holding hands (Pl. 46). The facial treatment, especially that of the eyes, resembles broadly the painting of "ordeal by liqor" just noticed. There may be a slightly earlier date to this painting which one could have place in the beginning of the third quarter of the 18th century. Not much of the painting has survived, fortunately.

But the fact of both these coming from Nurpur, from a collection the origin of which is known, is decidedly of interest.

In terms of miniatures, the group of paintings of the later mahants noticed before, and those after earlier originals of 17th century, generally fall into a category that is only too well known to us. These come under the 'late Guler' or 'Kangra' labels and while their presence in the various collections is of interest, we do not get to know much about styles in different parts of the hills or the plains through these paintings. These are standard pictures based on earlier models or cast in moulds which were by now very familiar. In this group, however, the painting of mahant Mansa Ram of Damthal with Raja Bir Singh
of Nurpur (Pl.53) is of strong interest because it bears a signature and is a work of considerable refinement. So also is the portrait of the old mahant who may be mahant Hari Ramji, and of the mahant sitting face to face with a Kangra lady (Pl.51), in the Chandigarh Museum. But, beyond this, one is not able to go in the analysis of the style of these paintings.

The portrait, from the collection of the mahant of Pindori, of mahant Ganga das with a princely figure sitting face to face with him, (Pl.62) possibly Mian Jai Singh of Guler, may be a contemporary painting of the middle of the 19th century or so. The borders are very typical of work at this date, as also are the borders of other pictures in the collection of the mahant of Pindori. Apparently these were produced in a set and may have been executed in the first half of the 19th century when the style had come to stay at this particular point and earlier portraits could be redone in the style which had thus become evolved. It is of interest to mention that some of these paintings bear a date on the margin which reads "S.1870" making them out to be painted in A.D.1813-14. The

1 This is in the collection of Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras, No. 363.

2 Chandigarh Museum, No. 280.
The veracity of this inscription is difficult to determine but one can only take notice of it.

Another miniature in the Pindori collection, that showing a scene in front of the Ramgopal temple with two mahant-like figures, one of which we identify as mahant Mohan das (Pl.65) is perhaps truly indicative of the style of miniature painting which had come to obtain towards the end of the 19th century in these parts. This is a miniature which has several "Sikh-style" elements; the work is still competent. The painter is no longer hesitant in showing full faces or three-quarter faces. In fact, he almost prefers to do this in this painting where only one figure, that of an attendant, is in profile and the other figures face towards the viewer. There is an attempt at showing spatial recession and the quality of modelling in the faces and the figures is suggestive of the influence of the oil technique which was being freely copied at this point of time. This is the end of the road, as it were, as far as painting at these establishments goes.

The evidence from Damthal in the form of Chandi Saptasati set painted by Nath Rajanaka, is no longer available. The painting of the Damthal establishment, showing the Narsimha avatara of Vishnu reproduced
by J.C. French, is in a recognizable 'Kangra' style. From other establishments like Dhyanpur, Ramtawali, or Dharamsal, very little indeed is available.

In terms of technique, there is no fresh contribution that any of these paintings of themes related to the Pindori, or the Dhamtal, or any other establishments from the area makes. The work of Sangatia who was at Jakhbar is not known. The result is that we can only take cognisance of work at the establishment. Our information about techniques which could have been extracted from a study of drawings or signed paintings etc. is not added to in any manner.

Murals: In a broad and general way, the first spurt of activity of mural painting at many of these establishments, that which we see as belonging to the second quarter of the 19th century can be seen as an extension of the paintings on the walls in the Pahari States. The murals from the Pahari areas have received their share of attention, first in a series of short but penetrating essays in Marg in 1964 and, more recently, in the study by Dr. Mira Seth. While an interest in these paintings has been

1 Himalayan Art, PI.XV.
2 This special issue of Marg covers almost all the hill states having extant evidence in the form of murals.
3 Wall Paintings of the Western Himalayas, Print. Date.
shown, the judgement as to the style of these paintings is generally somewhat stern. In his note, Dr. Mulk Raj Anand says:

"It is conceivable that departing from the tradition of drawings on paper to the conjuring of similar or different complexes on the walls, was not easily mastered. Even the best of the wall painters like Durga of Chamba, Bhagwan of Kulu and Muhamadi of Mandi, seem not to be great masters of wall painting, however they may have excelled in drawing on paper. The very attempt to copy the miniatures of the late 18th century, or to enlarge them, seems to have impoverished the line, making it cruder except in a very few paintings in the various places".

He goes on further:

"It almost seems as though the sap which had flowed on paper was drying up, and the mental faculties of these artisans could not grasp the nature of the task before them, except in rare moments which looked like flukes, compelled by the very nature of materials on some of the walls....There is little inventiveness. The composition tends to be an ad hoc arrangement. As every connoisseur knows, it is easier to make a montage of conventional flowers, with pleasing, stylised forms, than to organise emotive expression into painting where some degree of harmony might create suggestions of significance."

By and large, this judgement applies to the work on the walls of these establishments. When one sees the work

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which perhaps is among the best done on the walls of any monastic establishments - we are speaking of that on the Raghunath temple walls in the Pindori establishment - we are constantly being put in mind of much better work which had been done in the form of miniatures in the Pahari area. The viewer has to make allowances for differences in technique, for the fact that even though these are generally enlarged miniatures yet they are not seen from close quarters as miniatures and the artist has to eliminate a large number of details in the compositions. The backgrounds of most of these panels which are painted on the walls tend to be bare and flat. There are the occasional designs of trees and flowering bushes or, where they are needed, clouds in the sky, or arrows flying from army to army. But, generally, the artist confines himself to what happens in the front plane of the picture. Spatial depth does not interest him at all. And he thus lives, in these painted panels, in a world that is relatively simple and two-dimensional. The occasional large figure, as that of a dvarapala, or that of Hanuman, shows a certain force. It is almost an indication of the fact that, had the painter of these panels wanted to do this, had he wanted to break free from the very strong mould into which his thinking had been cast - that of a miniature painter - he might have done better work than he shows here. The figure of Hanuman, for
instance, to the left of the panel, which shows mahant Narotam dasji of Pindori (Pl.68), has a monumentality about itself which is quite impressive. It is possible that if he had had large surfaces to work on, and been encouraged by a discerning patron to forget about his heritage as far as miniatures are concerned, he might have gone about his task somewhat differently.

The work even as it is, is pleasing and there are occasionally very pretty small panels. But the whole thing is too strongly tied to the world of miniature paintings with which we are so familiar. And these paintings necessarily suffer in contrast with the paintings on paper. One possibility that cannot be ruled out is that the painter was asked by the mahants to "decorate" the wall. The excess of floral detail (Pl.69), winding creepers and little vases and guldastas that are painted on the ceiling on the walls, in every conceivable corner, may be the painter's response to the suggestion that the walls should look attractive while containing a number of panels telling of various stories. Undoubtedly the totality of the effect is quite sumptuous. It is when we focus on the individual panels as works of art that a certain measure of disappointment results.

The work at Damthal, which we can quite safely attribute to the artist Bishan das who, Ganeshi Lal tells us, was
showing 'the utmost powers of his art on the wall', is once again reminiscent so much of the Pahari painting with which we are familiar. On the whole, perhaps, the Damthal painter shows a little more courage than the painter of Pindori. If one takes, for instance, the panel showing the descent of the Ganga with Bhagiratha standing with folded hands before the seated figures of Shiva and Parvati on mount Kailash (Pl. 98), the treatment of the mountain in the background is markedly different from the treatment of snowclad mountains we find in paintings on paper. 1 In the very same panel, the general design has an air of monumentality which had earlier belonged to 17th century work but had somehow been lost in miniature painting in the 18th century, especially the latter part. Even when the painter treats a scene like the marriage of Rama and Sita (Pl. 96), he conceives the panel on a fairly large scale. The occurrence of the details of architecture, the turrets and the chhatris and the balconies in the foreground, at the bottom of the panel, is quite bold. It puts us in mind of the Nurpur frescoes of the Thakurdwara commonly ascribed to the artist Golu. 2 The attempt to pack in a great deal of activity while


at the same time not losing the focus of the picture is commendable. The enclosure within which the marriage ceremony takes place is very much in the same manner which we see in several paintings like that of Sultanu in the Chandigarh Museum. But added to that, to the top left, is yet another group of men seated under a canopy.

Altogether the composition has a pleasing air and the artist seems to be able to step out of the limits of a miniature and attempts something a little different. In the panel of the "Parshuram Ram Samvad" (Pl.95), again on the Ram Gopal temple walls, the painter shows a combination of points of view. There is the angle which is from above the eye level so that we are not only afforded a view of the outer wall of the place but of what is happening in the courtyard. And then, through vertical projection, the painter takes us to the architectural details in the background. Everything is within perfect visibility, and at the same time the artist succeeds in conveying an impression of considerable expanse within the confines of the marble palace. The group of the armies and the general figures in the scene showing the figure of Bhishma Pitamah lying on a bed of arrows is (Pl.100), again, quite attractive. The painter seems to have been struggling to get things right as far as

1 Chandigarh Museum, No. 164.
this new task of painting on the walls is concerned.

But of this order of painting on the walls there is very little indeed. This first phase that we see as finishing itself in the second quarter of the 19th century, and that we see as very closely related to Pahari painting on paper is not carried beyond this work.

The second phase of activity, and style, seems to become in with the end of the third quarter of the 19th century. It is interesting to see that this phase also is to be encountered by us at both Pindori and Damthal with which work of the earlier style is associated. The most typical of such work is that in the room that is called the gaddighar at Damthal. Here, there is a great distance that has been travelled by the painter from the building just below the gaddighar, the Ramgopal temple. We go into a different area altogether as we go up. The total feeling here is that of the over-ornate, heavily laden figures that we find in the plains of the Punjab, mostly by Sikh artists who looked back over their shoulders to the Pahari work but also were aware of the new techniques that had been brought in by Europeans. The attempt consistently on the part of the painter here is to retain the older kinds of compositions but the spatial treatment becomes somewhat
ambitious although it is never wholly successful. And in the faces, as also in the costumes, the painter is at pains to bring in a rounded feeling, an appearance of modelling, as it were. The figures become somewhat shorter, and heavier, than they were in the Pahari-inspired earlier murals and the artist generally attempts at creating relatively crowded compositions. The line is by no means as refined as it was, and the expression on the faces has become somewhat determined, losing the detachment it had without acquiring the expressiveness that it aims at. The result is a somewhat blank look that does not altogether please.

What is the most unusual feature of this kind of painting, however, is its colour. At first impact, colours appear to be harsh and garish, completely lacking in that refine softness which the earlier murals at these places possess. There is also a dryness of quality in the laying of the colours which comes from the tempera technique of murals as contrasted with the smooth, glazed character of the earlier work. What is lacking in refinement and feeling, however is somehow made up by the general boldness that the painter shows. He is quite naive; there is no attempt on his part to create large areas of sophistication in the panels. But through this naivete itself, he occasionally hits upon a composition that arrests. He also addresses himself to
rendering large sequences of the same story, thereby attempting certain episodes which are not commonly met with in Pahari painting. The passage in which the return of Bharat and Shatrughan from their maternal grandfather's house back to Ayodhya where Dasharatha is found by them as having died, and where Bharat takes his anger out by kicking the hunchbacked Manthara (Pl.102), are passages which are not common. Again, scenes of large assemblies which are attempted have a somewhat more ambitious character than those shown in portraits or small groups of figures, at least in the murals of the Ramgopal temple and the Raghunath temple of Pindori. Occasionally, the artist also makes bold to continue the narration outside the limits of the area of the rectangle created by him by painting additional or allusive passages on the plain surface around an arch, for example.

The attempt at producing an ool-technique effect in the paintings, in the laying of the colour as also in the tonality, is clear. Here one notices a parallelism between this rendering or handling of paint with the little portraits in the oval formats on ivory which were done in the third quarter of the 19th century by Sikh artists in

1See for ref., Archer, Mildred & W.G., Indian Painting for the British, London, 1955, pp.66-68. They have discussed the development of water-colour painting on ivory at Delhi. Also see, Archer, Paintings of the Sikhs, pp. 65-68.
the Punjab. A portrait of Raja Dhian Singh¹, or of Kunwar Nauj Nihal Singh², or of Sham Singh Atariwala³ is easy to compare, in this case, with the approach of the painter to rendering individual faces. In both cases there is limited success that he achieves. He only succeeds in getting away from the stylized and smooth faces that are there in the earlier type of murals which are closer to the paintings of the Pahari area.

One could take also the paintings which belong to the early eighties in the samadhi of Baba Mahesh das at Pindori. Apparently, the artist had some access to earlier miniature works which he had seen in collections either of the mahants or of other people. The general approach also remains the same. But the heavy accents in the rendering of the bodies, as also the increased attempts at naturalism mark his efforts. Occasionally, a pleasant effect is created by the artist deliberately ignoring the barrier between one episode and the other,

¹ See; Archer, Paintings of the Sikhs, p.163, Fig.90.
² Ibid., p.185, Fig. 78.
³ Ibid., p.179, Fig.60.
As for example, in the version of the *matsya avatara* and the *kurma avatara* in the ten avatara series on one of the walls (Pl. 85). Here, rather inventively, the artist does not clearly demarcate the area where one episode ends and the other begins. He seems to enjoy the idea of using the texture of water which he has created in the lower part of the painting for the *matsya* incarnation also for the *kurma* in that part of the panel where the churning of the ocean takes place. This continuity of action is missing in the very clearly defined panels, horizontal or vertical, that we generally find in other frescoes of this time.

The attempt of the painter to create, on the wall, scalloped and cusped arches through painting designs are also worthy of being noticed. It is as if he is suggesting a recession in a flat wall, creating the effect of the painting itself being in a niche rather than on the surface. Part of this could be traced back in Pahari miniatures where oval frames are created for paintings, thus leaving spaces in the spandrils for decorative floral work.  

But, here, it is only towards the top that this kind of pattern is made and one is reminded so much of the painted

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1 Also see, Archer, *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, Kangra (Plates) - 66(ii), 66(iv), pp.228-229; and Chamba (Plates) - 31, p.60.
niches on the wall not only in Pahari and Punjab painting but in painting in the Mughal and Rajasthani area. Here, as in the gaddighar at Damthal, the surfaces are quite dry, the colours have not penetrated the lime-plaster and the extent of damage is very considerable. If the paintings are visible at all that is because they are much more recent than the paintings of the other two establishments, the Raghunath mandir at Pindori and the Raajgopul mandir at Damthal.

A third and wholly different style which is seen at work is in the very roughly done mural panels on some of the walls in the courtyard leading to the gaddighar. Style, perhaps is not the correct word, one should call it only a phase of painting. The style still tries to imitate what has been done in the earlier murals and in the Pahari miniatures. But the execution is very much rougher. The line is broken and the quality of modelling attempted is very harsh. The figures of men and animals are rather badly drawn. The total effect is thus quite unpleasing. Only occasionally a good composition comes one's way, as the picture of the wrestling match (Pl.83) in a circle in which men who are the viewers sit. It appears that the earlier work done on the outer wall of gaddighar was much better in quality. This one can see in some little areas between the brackets which are above the arches of the verandah (Pl.94). These have survived quite well. But when the
were disintegrating, some persons, perhaps the masons who were involved in the building of the new part of gaddighar, decided to provide their own kind of decoration on the wall. The means are rough, the execution summary. The results are understandably rather clumsy.

The picture that emerges from the various phases of painting at these places is generally applicable to the works at other establishments also. The hands vary a little, but the total approach remains virtually the same. The move towards relative simplification on the one hand and a tendency towards ornate detail in certain parts of the painting on the other, mark much of the work that we see at Dhyanpur, Ramtatwali, Lehl etc. The total conception of the decoration is the same, the artist creating large floral areas, rectangular and squarish panels with arches created artificially are seen in profusion; the floral work in general is very hastily done, without possessing delicacy of line. At times, the artist at Dhyanpur moves very close indeed to the kind of book illustration, we find at the end of the 19th century in lithographs or, at the beginning of the 20th century, in simply printed coloured reproductions. There is not much reluctance on the part of the artist to show a full face and the shading on the bodies or on

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different parts of the picture is fairly pronounced. It is not easy to make a clear statement whether the figures are now shorter than they were before. The artist seems to elongate them when he gets the space and to shorten them when he does not. The costumes worn by the women are very much like the Punjab costumes seen in the paintings of the plains; the crowns of the deities begin to look a little more heavy than they were. But in general, the feeling that gets communicated is that the artist holds the older paintings to be examples to be emulated, and does not possess the necessary skill or refinement to reach that point. This is not to say that the effect is entirely unpleasing. Once again, the totality of the impact of the paintings and we must remember that we are looking at a ravaged series of panels—generally is felt by a viewer who moves into a picture gallery, as it were. But there is no new vision, no vitality as such in the work.

At Lehl, the general quality of work strikes one as poor and somewhat garish in appearance. The poor state of maintenance adds to this effect. But when one looks a little more closely, one finds an occasionally attractive panel like that in which Krishna stands under a tree, fluting, while Radha stands to the left (Pl.123) with folded hands. Here the attempt at naturalism is clearly discarded. The eyes are uncommonly large, somewhat reminiscent of the
convention that was so common in the 17th century. The figures also have hieratic scaling, something that the mid-19th century mural painters seem to have forgotten. And there is an ease, a sense of belief, in the action, which is somewhat impressive. One notices this particularly in the panel in which the Goddess kills the demon Mahishasura. It is as if the artist wholly takes for granted that the end of the contest is beyond any question. Durga stands almost in a leisurely fashion on the back of her tiger as it attacks the body of the buffalo demon in turn (Pl.120). It is unfortunate that some of these panels are as badly damaged as they are, or one might have been able to get a slightly better picture of the ability of the artist who was employed by the Lehl mahants.

The work at Ramtatwali is very extensive and late. It may be dateable in the last years of the 19th century and the repeated occurrence of panels which show the British presence in the Punjab makes it possible for us to notice that the artist was aware not only of what was happening around him but in the paintings which were now favoured by the British and the Indian patrons alike. Some of the panels in the separate room above the Ramtatwali establishment have a relatively fresh look. They may even have been painted in the 20th century. The line in these is particularly thick, but the link with the work in the
Pahari area is clearly retained. Everything is redolent of the Punjab plains; the costumes, the furniture, the modified types of crowns the dieties wear, the heavy modelling and the generally hasty execution. In particular, a panel showing Guru Nanak Dev with Bala and Mardana (Pl.140) is very much a part of the work that we are used to looking at from the Punjab plains. This, is, in a way, Sikh painting proper from the point of view of the treatment of the figures and the general tendency to enrich the surface as much as is possible.

The work in the temple below has a certain amount of competence. The equestrian portraits of the mahants are reasonably well done, especially when it comes to the figures of the galloping horses. The two Sikh army-guards with bared swords, who stand as sentries on the side walls in life-size panels, are again done with some competence. The figures are stiff, but all the same have an air of dignity about themselves. The Ramatwali painter shows evidence of enterprise when he attempts to do a scene that is different from the usual. One is left wishing that the skill of the artists employed here had matched the boldness which they display in some of the panels. It is interesting to remark here that some of the larger panels, which not only attempt naturalism of a kind but also employ heavy shading in the faces, are probably the pre-cursors of
the popular calendars that are in turn based upon colour lithographs which started becoming popular towards the end of the 19th century. The divine figures of Shiva and Parvati, or Radha and Krishna, or Arjuna, are figures that we meet very much more often in the glossy calendars, and the mind and hand which make the Ramatatwali murals is the kind of mind and hand which produced that work which reached many people through the graphic process.

Dharamsal, both in terms of its style and its content, has received notice before. The one panel to which attention needs to be drawn in particular, is that in which we have a number of religious persons seated in two rows (Pl.124). This comes as close to a drawing on a wall as we can get. The colours in the forms of the persons are not filled and here one can discern the quality of the line much better than in some of the finished paintings. The painter not only employs a thick, somewhat halting line but also leaves the extremities to be worked out at a later stage. The mere outline of the tree, very sketchily filled in with colours, is yet another indication that the work is far from finished. As for the rest, the Dharamsal murals belong, once again, to the third quarter of the 19th century or perhaps even later.

The frescoes in the Mansa Devi temple, attributed as they are to the painter Angad of Sirmur, partake of much of the character of Pahari paintings on the walls in general. The two styles here, however, seem to be separated from each other by at least a generation. There are some paintings with a burnished surface but now badly damaged, which might belong to the last quarter of the 18th century, but most of them particularly those executed for Raja Gopal Singh in A.D. 1813, are in a later, more hasty hand. The compositions are quite innovative and one remarkable feature of these paintings is the long inscriptions on them not only identifying the principal figures involved but narrating the entire episode line after line (Pl.156). As has been aptly remarked, it is as if pages of a manuscript have been opened and displayed for being looked at all at once on the walls of this shrine. The panels closer to the ceilings showing the various rupas of the goddess are quite interesting. They show the devi in a frontal view, and the awkwardness of the effect strikes one. But, as for the rest, the drawing is competent. The inventiveness of

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1 See, Goswamy, B.N. "Some Nineteenth Century Frescoes and the painter 'Angad' of Sirmur", Arts Asiatiques, Vol. 11, No.1, p.100.

2 Ibid., p.102.
the artist as he uses the spandrils created by an arch is again in evidence and there is an occasional burst of energy in the composition. This is particularly evident in the scene where Krishna throws up the enormous elephant, Kuvalayapida, as he and Balrama with the gopas approach the court of Kamsa. The boldness with which the entire background is left bare in the sequence where the gods pay their homage to the goddess sitting on a throne is again worthy of being noted. These frescoes have a character of their own. Undoubtedly, Angad, if he was the painter of these panels, was a gifted artist, who knew how to make some adjustments to painting on the walls from the usual style in which he must have marked miniature painting.

The paintings in the Udasi deras that we have noticed, mostly from Amritsar, come very close to Sikh painting of the third quarter of the 19th century or later. From the akhara Balanand when we notice themes portrayed on the walls, the long inscriptions descriptive of action strike one. There is also the feeling that the entire episode is not too well known to the viewers and therefore, these long texts in Gurmukhi have been provided. The general heaviiness of the modelling on the faces, and the simulation of oil technique is clearly noticeable in many of these panels. The way the artist renders the heaviiness of the drapery, and the way in which the figures are placed so as to suggest a
certain recession are only indicative of the painter's general admiration for European techniques which had been introduced into the Punjab by this time. The work in the akhara Chhatewala is a little more suggestive of derivation from the Pahari area. But here, too, there is the strong admixture of the strain of work that was being done in the Punjab hills.

It is in the paintings on the walls of the Bahadurpur dera that one comes upon a flash of ingenuity not only in the rendering of the individual figures but in the way in which the artists seem to take everything in his stride, including a juxtaposition of Sikh gurus and Hindu deities, and Rama themes and Krishna themes, all within the same panel. The figures here are, as elsewhere, summarily treated, but they attain a height which gives them a certain gravity. The halos that are provided to practically every figure in these panels are another feature. But the charm with which the artist gives up all pretence to consistency makes its own impact.

However, if one has to look for truly naive paintings, which acknowledge no debt and show possibly no awareness of work in the Pahari region or in the Punjab plains elsewhere, one has to turn to tiny establishment of the Jogis at Pinjore. This group of paintings on
the walls is really without precedent. To me it appears to be, without much question, the work of totally self-taught artists, perhaps the masons who raised these buildings. The result is extremely rough but the inventiveness of the artist comes through. The representation of the Goddess Durga on a tiger is unlike anything that is generally seen in the range of Pahari painting. Likewise, the artist's notion of the demon Rakasura is entirely his own. The crane's stunted body, the extra long beak, and the playful manner in which Krishna seems to be bent upon breaking the top half of the beak, are all very different from anything else we have noticed. This style—which one can call the "mason style" of work, is found on the walls of houses in several parts of the Punjab and Haryana. But if it has not been noticed here in any detail, it is because those houses and establishments are not monastic in character and fall outside the limited scope of present study.

It is not without interest, at the end of this consideration of styles, to draw attention to the three categories of wall paintings that are spoken of from the technical point of view. Dr. T.R.Gairda in his "Technical Notes" in the Marg issue on Pahari murals, has this note


There are three categories of wall paintings from the point of view of principal techniques employed in their execution. These are (1) tempera, (2) fresco and (3) fresco-secco. In the tempera technique the painting is done on the dry wall plaster with pigments made in an organic medium which may be glue, gum, albumin etc. Tempera paintings are not durable. The fresco is done in a wet wall plaster with pigments ground in water. In this case the pigments get embedded in the lime plaster and are well fixed up. Fresco paintings, therefore, are durable and do not wash out with water and are less prone to damage. In fresco-secco, the painting is done on a dry wall with pigments ground in lime water. This class of painting goes between the tempera and the true fresco so far as durability is concerned.

Having said this, Dr. Gairda characterizes the wall paintings from Chamba, at least those in the Rang Mahal, as being tempera in character. Some of these paintings, he notices, were lavishly coated with shellac varnish to preserve them.

It would be simple to characterize the work on the walls that we have been looking at as tempera also. But, quite possibly, we have here both the techniques, tempera in the later phases of painting on the walls, and fresco-secco, or at least a local modification of it, in the earlier paintings at least at Pindori and Damthal. The way in which colour has become saturated into the wall in these cases, and the way in which the artist has been able to get a high finish, makes these Pindori and Damthal frescoes distinguishable from the later work which has much more of a dry, perishable quality.
The colours that have been used in the paintings are very much the same that Mr. Jagdish Mittal\(^1\), for instance, has listed in his work on "Chamba" wall paintings. There are mineral colours such as the yellow ochre, Geru, Hermuji, Lajward, Singraf and Harital; chemical colours like Peoree and Sindur and Kajal and Safeda; and organic colours like Neel and Mahawar.

Throughout this period, apparently, this range of colours was known to the painter. It is their distribution which went on changing. The heavy emphasis on indigo blues in the gaddighar murals in Damlhal, for instance, makes these paintings stand out as later in date than the earlier, softer works in the Ramgopal temple. Likewise, in much of the tempera work on the outer walls, as at Pinjore and in the gaddighar in Pindori, the preference that the artist shows is for ochre brown. Probably he knew how to handle these colours better than others. The whole range of pigments does not ever reach the breadth that the Pahari painter shows in his work. For instance, these carmine-reds and these sage-greens do not occur in these paintings virtually at all. But, by and large, the painter shows awareness of many more colours than one first imagines to be within his range.

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We have no idea at all as to what was the nature of collaboration between the masons and the painters. The process of preparing the lime-plaster on the wall for receiving the colours is an extremely intricate one. Ordinarily, one would expect this to have been done by the painter himself. But, if the oral tradition available from the painters' families in the hills is any indication, the painters would not do "heavy" or "rough" work of this kind by themselves, for it tended to coarsen their hands which needed to stay soft and light for fine work. It is, however, entirely possible that the preparation of the lime plaster was done under the close supervision of the painters themselves. At Damthal, as has been pointed out earlier, a place not far from the establishment shows where the bhattis or kilns for preparing lime from which lime plaster was derived had been set up. The account books of mahant Gopal das in the middle of the 19th century from Damthal mention a large number of masons, brick-layers and carpenters whose payments are listed. Most of them incidentally, happen to be Muslims. But, in the absence of any precise indication, it is difficult to guess at the division of labour between painter and mason, both of whom must have been involved in the work on the murals.
From the point of view of technique, once again, we are working in ignorance of what kinds of brushes were used, or what kinds of binding mediums precisely were employed by these painters. Hopefully, more work of a technical kind along these lines will be done not only with regard to the better known wall paintings in the Himalayan states but also on the wall paintings of the Punjab plains like the ones noticed here. And, hopefully, this will be done before the few traces that are now there also disappear.