

BASOHLI PAINTINGS

Dr.Parul Manhas

The wall paintings of the Jammu region have mostly been created between 1832 A.D. to 1890 A.D. This period is considered by some to be the cultural renaissance period of Jammu. These paintings were created mostly in palaces and temples in Jammu, Poonch, and Ramnagar. In Jammu besides the old palaces of the royal family, these murals are found in Raghunath temple, Dewana Mandir, and Purani Mandi. The old fort in Poonch, built by Dhian Singh, also possesses such wall paintings. In Udhampur, Ramnagar palaces are famous for such murals. The techniques employed in these murals in the Jammu region seem to be highly evolved with a great understanding of the principles of decorating walls. These techniques might have originated from the rock paintings in Madhya Pradesh.

One of the prominent relict features of the landscape of Jammu is the forts which look like iconic settlements, amidst the urban and rural settlements, largely because of their architectural peculiarity. They have been looked at from the perspective either of military history or of architectural peculiarity. One has taken the study of forts beyond this conventional mode of historiography on the fort by exploring their symbolic and economic importance. Needless to say, the study of their strategic or military aspects shall be an integral part of the study. It, however, shall not be examined in isolation which has usually been the case. The study thus, focuses on the origin, geographical distribution, typology, and the manner they were located as an organic structure in the larger socio-economic process of the region. This will also necessitate the study of forts about the other settlements around.

The study also throws light on the distribution of forts as well as t
In the Dogra hills it was Basohli which became the most important center
of the Pahari style of painting. It resisted the onslaught of Persian
(Islamic) culture and art for a longer period than other states. It got due
patronage from the rulers of Basohli especially Raja Kripal Pal, Raj
Medini Pal, and Raja Amrit Pal. They provided the requisite support and
patronage to the artists during the 17th and early 18th centuries. Raja
Kripal Pal (1678-1693) of Basohli is considered the first ruler in this
region to patronize the artists regularly. It was also during his reign that
this art of painting left the royal palaces and courts and became public.
In 1835 A.D. the English traveller Vigne visited Basohli. He was highly
impressed with the grandeur of the royal palaces of Basohli kings. These
palaces were decorated with beautiful paintings of Lord Krishna and
Gopis and also with that of royalty. The miniature paintings created by
the local artists were simply exquisite. The love poem of Gita Govind
written by poet Jayadeva in the 12th century was a cherished theme of
the Basohli painters. It describes the relationship between Krishna and
the *gopis* of Vrindavan most subtly and colorfully. In 1730 A.D. during
the time of Ranjit Dev, a complete set of colourful illustrations of the
Gita-Govind was beautifully painted by the famous artist Manaku who
himself was a great devotee of Vishnu¹. There were many themes on
which Basohli artists used to make their paintings and one such
favourite theme was the delightful series of *Baramasa*, the twelve
months of the year.
