



Challenges of Preservation and Revival of Basohli Painting in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

A leading school of the Pahari miniature art characterised, especially in bold colours, expressive shapes, and classical iconography, Basohli painting flourished in the Jammu region patronized by Raja Kripal Singh and his successors in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Although Basohli painting is a bustling part of cultural values today, it is exposed to a high level of risks especially compliments of manuscript tort which is caused by the degradation of such art attributes along with the lack of traditional skills coupled with academic and institutional support. The paper is critical analysis of Basohli painting history, aesthetic and socio-political pathways. It evaluates what has been done so far in terms of preservation and frames a threefold premise systematized conservation, renewing traditional training, and innovative adaptation in the context of modern media, as a method of its sustainability.

Introduction

Basohli painting, found in the hill town of Basohli Kathua district, Jammu & Kashmir was a predecessor of the Pahari schools of miniature art. Its aesthetic attributes are vivid colours, muscular lines, frontal figures and dramatic compositions based on Vaishnava texts and the Ragamala series. The Basohli



paintings were patroned by princes since the 17th century, and influenced the wider Pahari idioms, prefiguring the development of the regional centres such as Guler and Kangra. Modern interest has been spurred by scholarly re-invention and local craft-revival efforts.

The Basohli painting has technical (preservation of material), socio-economic (livelihood of artisans), institutional policy lapses, and cultural passing of skills preservation challenges. Revival, both preservation of the past and reenactment of the living, should address this complexity. In this paper, the authors map core barriers and critically assess revival interventions as they are manifested through policy, news and NGO or university programmes.

Significance and Current Status

The Basohli painting is generally recognised as formative of the Pahari miniatures, which are characterised by extreme colour usage, stylised architecture and religious theme. In museum collections and in private holdings a few exemplary folios are preserved, but many works remain in a precarious condition beyond institutional holding. Its living school dwindled with the demise of royal patronage and lived on, by family lines and in ad hoc community ateliers.

The recent decades were marked by new documentation and small-scale revival, which was spearheaded by state cultural departments, nongovernmental organizations, and regional universities. The increasing institutional awareness of the Basohli cultural and economic potential is evidenced by policy interventions like GI registration with the support of NABARD and state handicrafts departments. However, local implementation loopholes and administrative laxity are frequent complaints.

Core Challenges

Basohli methods are based on recipe of special pigments and the art of miniature brushes and composition vocabularies passed on a non-scientific tradition of master-apprentice relationships. Ruptures of the twentieth century, especially the disintegration of patronage, the departure of the city, the spread of livelihoods, have eroded the master artist pool. Training workshops are available but sporadic, not reproducing long apprenticeships to stylistic fidelity, and leading to diluted or hybridized conventions.

Old miniatures are threatened by damp and high-UV light as well as insects and improper past restoration. Not many regional museums have conservators knowledgeable in Pahari-style papers,



pigments and adhesives. Formal conservation policies and climate-management are uncommon; administration is lax and increases the deficiencies.

Artisans are given low and irregular payment with channels of fair market quite unusual and middlemen controlling supply channels. Imitations that are produced on a large scale further devalue and mislead consumers. Modern markets demand flexible products and the tension between economic activity and stylistic authenticity has emerged.

There are national and state schemes but they are not well enforced. The workshops and exhibitions are presented in news reports without any long-term follow-up or investment. Low funding and administrative indifference exacerbate the lack of co-ordination between heritage, tourism and local governance institutions. GI recognition is encouraging, but quality control and continued action is slow.

Basohli is located in a sensitive state where cultural projects are susceptible to migration patterns and infrastructural shortages. The lack of connectedness and market size does not favour the participation of artisans in national circuits.

Limited systematic on-line indexing of extant Basohli work limits scholarship and makes remote conservation difficult. The sale of low-quality imitations of authentic products, without regulation, undermines legitimate livelihoods and effectively hides provenance. In the meantime, digital illiteracy restricts the ability of artisans to access the market.

Revival Efforts by Local and Institutional Interventions

Local art institutions and universities at Jammu have held skills workshops, such as Basohli miniature painting training sessions aimed at entrepreneurship and formal training. There is still a need of scaling and systematic curriculum design.

Women have been trained in Basohli techniques by NGOs and local master-artists, diversifying the artisan community and resistance across communities. Through these activities livelihoods are created and transmission of skills increased.

Then GI processes, which have the patronage of NABARD and handicrafts departments, are designed to safeguard the Basohli origin-related value. The strategic implementation can increase incomes and support authenticity in case of the traceability and quality audit.



Community galleries and small museums provide throughput in terms of exhibition opportunities, education and cultural tourism, but lack adequate funding and technical capacity.

Even with these efforts, much revival is project-oriented rather than systemically funded or tracked, with no connection to conservation science and market development that can be scaled.

Why Existing Measures Are Not Sufficient

Revival in short-term projects often pits conservation of historic works against living, economically viable practice. The continuation of Basohli is hinged on both- artefacts that have been preserved and also the active artisans. Skills cannot be developed in workshops but can be built in sustainable careers; branding is safe under GI policies, but will have to be accompanied by functional supply-chain reform and strong quality control.

Outside large museums, technically rigorous conservation is inadequate and digital and market systems are not well developed. The commodification of Basohli superficiality stands a risk of losing both connoisseur audiences and the true practice. As such, the agency of artisans, equitable payment, and rights in the control of cultural assets should be considered.

Recommendations

Digitise all remaining Basohli folios, in public and private collections, in high resolution, via an open-access collection site with provenance, technical analysis and conservation record.

Develop long apprenticeship programmes 6 to 24 months incorporating master-apprentice training, digital literacy, design adapting, and business skills. Certify coursework by universities or vocational schools.

Establish conservation workstations and training programs centred on paper-based art and traditional pigments, with an emphasis on climate controlled storage and traveling support teams. Form collaborations with conservation institutes across the country.

Cooperatives and social enterprises that combine production and branding and direct access to the market through e-commerce and curated fairs. Status of a pair GI and traceability and quality auditing in order to make sure that premium pricing accouche to artisans; assist working capital and microfinance.

Establish a Basohli Heritage Council comprising of artisans, heritage non-governmental organisations, academic community, local government and tourism agencies, charged with long term strategy,



programme management and fund-raising. Use Basohli heritage as an economic and cultural boost in regional education and tourism programs.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitation of the study is that only secondary sources are used but very soon, an ethnographic fieldwork is required to evaluate household economies, pigment recipes, workshop structures and local attitudes toward market/policy initiatives. The relationships between genders, transfer of skills across generations, and the influence of socio-political situations in the region should be discussed further. Trials of pilot projects based on the combined recommendations must be followed longitudinally.

Conclusion

Basohli art stands alone in the artistic tradition of India. Technically rigorous, socially just, and economically sustainable interventions are now essential to its survival in the 21st century. Projectized responses, workshops, ad hoc digitisation, though essential, are not enough. A sustainable recovery needs to align conservation of historic works to strong livelihoods, supply-chain transformation and institutional accountability. Governments, academia, NGOs and communities working together can make Basohli painting a heritage as well as a living art that despite being relevant in modern times, it remains authentic in its style, true to the roots of its creation.

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