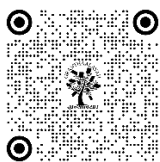


RECONSIDERATION OF KANGRA MINIATURE PAINTING FROM THE DESIGN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The style of Kangra miniature paintings never ignores the necessity of intricate craftsmanship. The craft qualities in Kangra miniature painting are bringing new opportunities to be revived. Every intricate decorative pattern or motif of this style is a piece of innovative design and required to be analyzed and evaluated from a modern perspective. It has the potential to develop a language of modern Indian decorative design. Exploring the future possibilities of the crafts in Kangra miniature paintings is the prime objective of this research article. To understand design potentials practically in this style, the author had been trained under the traditional Kangra artists for two months in Kangra. The author has also observed the collaborative activities of NIFT Kangra with them. The fieldwork also included visits to the historical Kangra fort and temples where the original remains of traditional Kangra-style architectures, exteriors, and interior designs exist even today. The paper argues, design elements in such traditional art carry the idioms of the cultural identity of a community. The patterns and motifs of the Kangra style carry the Indian idioms of design. It requires more attention from the perspective of Cultural Sustainability.

Keywords: Kangra Miniature Painting, Decorative Design, Heritage, Indian Art

1. INTRODUCTION

The style of miniature painting evolved in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh is considered a precious gem of Pahari schools of miniature painting that flourished in the 17th to 18th century in the North Indian states of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu, Uttarakhand, and Punjab. The artistic aspects of the Kangra style have been discussed for a long period across the world. The prime argument of this paper is Kangra miniature paintings are equally important from the perspective of design. This paper will also analyze the inspirational roots of the design elements in Kangra paintings with a comparative discussion on the characteristics of Indian and Western design.

2. METHOD

This research involves an auto-ethnographic method where the researcher spent several months in Kangra to learn the technicalities of Kangra art from the Traditional miniature artists. The observations were cross-checked with the existing literature on Kangra-style art and the concept of design all over the world. Photographic documentation, Interactions with artists and scholars, visiting places of remaining ancient Kangra architecture and museum visits were done to imbibe the entire scenario.

3. CONTEXTUAL BACKDROP OF KANGRA MINIATURE PAINTING

Indian art ideology was deeply inspired by ancient Indian philosophy which promotes spiritual cognizance over sensual consciousness. This special approach or tendency enhanced the possibilities of basic design principles like functionality, simplicity, and mobility. To understand the core characteristics of Kangra style design we must go through the cognitive process that has been pursued since the ancient ages of Indian art and culture. The legendary artist and founder of Bengal School, Abanindranath Tagore has discussed the penance of being an artist from the Indian perspective. Imitation of reality is not enough here. Every work of art must be soaked with the nectar of ecstasy (Abanindranath Tagore, Translated by Ranendranath Bandyopadhyay 2006). Stella Kramrisch, A. K Coomaraswami, E.B. Havell, Kapila Vatsayan and associating orientalists also support this point of view. Collectively these great writings demonstrate the Indian ideology of beauty. Indian art does not have any hierarchy between art and craft. Every touch of brush in Indian painting is an offering to the god. It does not allow any visual ambiguity to create forceful emphasis. Stella Kramrisch in 'A Survey of Indian Painting in the Decan' explains the spiritual essence in the artworks of South India. It delivered a discourse on the aesthetic spirit of Indian art across different periods. It covered the early phase of Ajanta of the 2nd century to the art of 14th-century Vijaynagara with the art of Bijapur, Ahmednagar, and Golkonda [Kramrisch \(1983\)](#). We will get an alternative thinking perspective from Kramrisch. She has explained the artworks with the basic principles of design such as space, colour, and rhythm. The next bigger chapter of Indian art to be discussed is Ajanta. 'Ajanta Frescos' written by Lady [Herringham \(1998\)](#) and 'Ajanta Murals' written by [Ghosh \(1967\)](#) are remarkable works of research in this regard, especially to know the impact of this phase on Indian art. These literary deliberations speak about the endlessness in the Ajanta compositions. This essence of infinity is a core character of Indian philosophy which also generate a visual culture. That visual weather is capable to imbibe the architectural plan of Ajanta caves and the beauty of nature around it. 'The Development of Style in Indian Painting' by Karl J [Khandalavala \(1974\)](#) shares the observations where the continuity of Indian spiritual ideals was continued in visual aesthetics. His other literary works focused on Western Indian manuscript paintings of Kalakachariya Katha, and miniature paintings also describe the gradual changes in the next phases of Indian art. In manuscripts and miniature paintings linear decorations is the only way to ornament the glory of the characters. Dependency on linear works also made Indian art simple and stylization. Therefore, Indian art become more design prone.

Renowned art historian Jiwan Sodhi has explained his observations on 'Bunndi Painting' where the designing skills of these ancient miniature artists have come out

as a special artistic ability [Sodhi \(1999\)](#). 'Kangra Paintings on love' by M. S. Randhawa has included a consolidated list of flora and faunas that have been depicted in the Kangra miniature style. The depiction of these plants, animals and birds was not appropriately realistic but idealistic. They will be recognized by their character but the application of characteristic details during depiction does not disturb the stylistic melody of the paintings. This stylization connects each Kangra painting with the great legacy of Indian art. The impact of Islamic rule also influenced the characterization of Indian painting. The Indo-Persian style developed in the Mughal court (16th to 17th century) demonstrated its potential for decorative design through the wonderful hand-depicted frames or margins of the paintings [Rogers \(1993\)](#). The book 'Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire: Manuscripts and Paintings in the British Library' by [Losty & Roy \(2012\)](#) is also mentionable in this regard. They also helped to understand the pattern of cross-cultural exchanges of design idioms in the Indian subcontinent possible because there was a natural form of visual narration in the stylistic spirit of Indian art. BN Goswamy and Eberhard Fischer have shown in 'Pahari Masters', there were fourteen Pahari masters who can be identified by individual styles who were famous by their name. Their individual stylistic differences among these artists revealed in this book show the scope of diversification [Goswamy & Fischer \(1997\)](#). 'Kangra Paintings on love' by [Randhawa \(1962\)](#) is one of those very few works which are dedicated to Kangra art. 'Kangra Paintings on Bihari Sat Sai' by the same writer is also mentionable here [Randhawa \(1966\)](#). Randhawa highlighted Baramasa, the love between Nayakas and Naykas, nature and the relation with contemporary literature of ancient Kangra art. The book 'Painting in Kangra Vally' helps to understand the undeniable existence of the Mughal impact on the Kangra style [Sharma \(2020\)](#). We all know, Mughal paintings always appreciate decorative designs to be a part of them.

4. RELATION BETWEEN ART AND DESIGN

The borderline between art and design is not clear. Some say art is about aesthetics only. But designs never avoid the aesthetic need in appearance. The gothic architectures and the monolithic Kailash temple of India are great works of design. All admire them as great works of art as well because they are aesthetically outstanding. In design functionality of an object or form solves a particular problem. This kind of over-generalized definition faces challenges. We may notice almost every house has some utility products acting like exhibits. It may be a grandfather clock, or a tea set in the showcase. People do not use them but love to let them enhance the beauty of their houses through their decorative appearance. Here aesthetics of a design surplus utility. Therefore, art and design are deeply interlinked.

5. DESIGN CULTURE AND EDUCATION IN THE WEST AND IN INDIA

For the additional progression of education, across the disciplines study and exploration are invigorated in the present academic world.

The bequest recalls the acclaimed art and craft movement of Britain held in the late 19th century to the early 20th century. The fluctuation was stimulated and influenced by prodigious art and craft leaders like John Ruskin, Augustus Pugin, and William Morris. The specialists and anxious intelligentsias of 19th century Britain fingered the absence of competence of aesthetic brilliance in utility and lifestyle products. People were getting dumb about the presence of beauty in their daily life.

They were developing a habit of acceptance whatever they get easily at the nearby shop.

When the public initiates to use objects without any aesthetic quality, consequently it misses the vibe of positivity. In a condition like that prolific art intellectuals like Richard Redgrave (1852) began to reform design education. The Bauhaus movement in Germany (1919- 1993) added further advancements in the arena.

It did not stop there. The effect of the Bauhaus program radically transformed the pictorial ethos and provided the whole world with a global stylization which is uninterruptedly stimulating the existing design practices. These radical actions have proved the inevitability of design edification in art institutes.

The topic design is stretched over a vast zone of cognitive practice. The publishing of the key inquiries considerable as academically permissible on the design was initiated as the legacy of the great Art & Craft movement of Britain. To develop a scientific and systematic research language with worldwide objectivity on the basic principles and definitions of design new research literature became essential. Richard Redgrave's 'Supplementary Report on Design' [Redgrave \(1852\)](#), [Wyatt and Gurney \(1851\)](#)'s 'Industrial Arts of the Nineteenth Century' (1851) and some other written works faced these issues in the initial phase.

20th century Bauhaus movement in Germany was an additional lift for the design domain all over the world. 'Point and Line to Plane' (1947) written by [Kandinsky \(1947\)](#) is a book which has a detailed discussion on line and plane, point, size, form, emphasis, colour and philosophy of design.

To be familiar with the account of vitalizing of the realm of design pedagogy and its international influence on world culture by the Bauhaus movement and succeeding side-shoots like Ulm School.

Some scholars dedicated their studious ability to explore the specificity of core design elements in terms of learnability of the product, functionality in life, perceptual clarity to the customers, attractiveness, and execution [Butler et al. \(2010\)](#). These kinds of studies structured the designed syllabus and brought clarity to both sides, designers, and industry people. Gradually discussions on the illusionary cosmos and the concept of a form, linear rhythm, shape, form, texture other details were brought forth [Anderson \(1961\)](#). Some design scholars started to write about functionality and the construction of graphical qualities in photographs and representation through magnitude, transparency, upright position, angle, light, mobility, and colour [Kepes \(1951\)](#). To comprehend the pictorial dynamism and colour theories and their kith and kin with the elementary components of design, a new genre of communicative research was developing [De Sausmarez \(1983\)](#). The discussion was extended by raising the applicability of the basic designing components in paintings and sculptures [Arnheim \(1947\)](#). This discussion not only interlinked both disciplines but also revitalize the teaching-learning process of art and design.

India's foremost design institutions are operated under IITs, NITs, NIDs, and NIFTs. Renowned art institute particularly the state and central universities also motivate their students to work on computer graphics and applied art but for the improper logistics and inadequate working environment, students do not get the required courage to face the struggle of the corporate world. They are struggling in this field. The expenditures and course fees of the dedicated design institutes are too high. In a country like India that expenditure is beyond capacity for most people.

At the school level of education, the section on fine arts is not well structured and not facilitated in identifying artistic and design potentials among the students.

6. DESIGN-ORIENTED PRACTICES IN KANGRA

Figure 1



Figure 1 Kangra Style Architectural Design. Raja Sansar Chand's Palace Sujampur Tira Near Hamirpur

The remaining memories of the historical Kangra art can be visible in the paintings in museum collections all over the world. The Kangra Fort in Kangra, Raja Sansar Chand's Palace and Narvadeswar temple in Sujampur of Hamirpur district are examples of Architectural patterns practised in the Royal Kangra period. The large architectural structures were designed with the best qualities of the Mughals, Rajasthani, and Pahari architectural cultures.

Figure 2



Figure 2 Kangra Style Exterior Design. Raja Sansar Chand's Palace Sujampur Tira Near Hamirpur

Figure 3



Figure 3 Application of Kangra Motifs and Patterns in Modern Crockerics

Figure 4



Figure 4 Design of Sarees with Kangra Painting

At present, traditional Kangra miniature artists are trying to explore new possibilities for Kangra- style designs. The author has observed several collaborative projects going on during the visit to Kangra (Nov. 2021- Jan. 2022). Esteemed institutes like NIFT, and Kangra are exchanging design and artistic cognizance with these traditional artists through these projects. They are working mainly on decorative motifs and patterns which are applicable in the sectors of interior design, exterior design, utility products, lifestyle accessories, and fashion design. A process of facilitation by modern logistics has been initiated to revitalize the traditional heritage of Kangra-style design by imbibing it into the contemporary lifestyle.

7. CONCLUSION

It is an artistic synthesis which may inspire upcoming designers to explore the Indian style of design. The traditional Kangra artists who have faced a long period of negligence may get the opportunity to re-energise art if they learn to apply the design elements in modern life. Government and non- governmental organizations may help them with modern logistics, marketing, digitalization, and advertisement in print, electronic and social media, and management. Therefore, this paper invites the attention of the concerned authorities to learn and support the design potentials of Kangra art.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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