

Mankot Miniature Painting With Reference To Bhagavata Purana

Abstract

The Mankot miniature painting is the offshoot of the 'Jammu Kalam' of Pahari Painting. Mankot derives its name from its founder, 'Raja Manak Dev'. Illustrations of the 'Ramayana' and the 'Bhagavata Purana' most probably belonging to the first decade of the eighteenth century, formed the core of the 'Mankot Raj Collection' acquired by Chandigarh Museum. This Bhagavata Purana is in horizontal format illustrating Krishna's exploits with cow-herds. This great series is the finest and most dramatic in the entire Mankot Raj Collection. It has its original style and use of distinctive idioms. Another Bhagavata Purana modeled on the earlier horizontal one but vertical in format and more summary in execution in strongly Mankot style is found in the Lambagraon collection, Kangra. These paintings of the Bhagavata Purana have some remarkable characteristics of their own.

Keywords: Mankot Miniature Painting, Mankot Raj Collection, Bhagavata Purana, Krishna's Exploits, Horizontal and Vertical Format.

Introduction

The Mankot miniature painting is the offshoot of the 'Jammu Kalam' of Pahari Painting. The entire collection of these paintings is known as "Mankot Raj Collection" which is in possession of Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh. Illustrations of the 'Ramayana' and the 'Bhagavata Purana' most probably belonging to the first decade of the eighteenth century, formed the core of the Mankot Raj Collection. These paintings of the Bhagavata Purana have some remarkable characteristics of their own which can be analyzed on the basis of Elements of Art.

Objectives of study

The Bhagavata Purana Paintings of Mankot Style are unique in their execution and have a distinctive style. To establish this fact, following are the objectives of study:-

1. To study the historical background of Mankot Miniature Paintings
2. To study the importance and uniqueness of the Mankot Paintings
3. To analyze the Bhagavata Purana Paintings of Mankot Style on the basis of elements of art
4. To study the characteristic features of Bhagavata Purana Paintings of Mankot Style

Review of Literature

Mankot is a small state lying between Jammu and Basohli, which is now known as Ramkot. Until the second half of the 17th century, none of the Rajput states in the Punjab Hills seem to have possessed any schools of local painting. Shortly after 1650, Mankot, a small state developed a school of portraiture, and this was to last for almost a century. There is a fort which was the seat of 'Mankotia' chiefs, who are known as Mankotia Mians. Mankot derives its name from its founder, 'Raja Manak Dev', who was a contemporary of Raja Narsingh Dev (c. 1272- 1314) of Jammu¹. Other important patron was Raja Mahipat Dev (c. 1660 -1690) whose burly figure with hooked nose was portrayed in the contemporary style of the plains. But after his daughter married Kirpal Pal of Basohli, the style was so much influenced by Basohli that it is often difficult to distinguish Mankot output from Basohli work.

Mankot was first attributed by 'G. Forster' in 1808 and then by 'F.Drew' in 1875. In 1912 Kahan Singh Balauria and in 1933 J. Hutchison and J.P. Vogel gave complete historical account of Mankot².

Ghose in 1929 and Mehta in 1949 reproduced an attributed to Basohli some paintings which subsequent research seems to indicate to be of Mankot provenance³. Much more material came to light with M.S. Randhawa's study of the Mankot Raj Collection. Archer W.G. in 1973 produced a work of immense scholarship in which he gave an



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elaborate account of various sub - schools under Pahari school of Miniature painting.

In the year 2007, Sandhu S. completed an extensive analytical research work on Mankot Miniature Paintings possessed by Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, which is her own contribution in this field.

Hypothesis

At the instance of M.S. Randhawa, the Punjab Government acquired some 250 paintings for their museum from 'Tikka Inder Vijay Singh', a descendant of Mankot Rajas then settled at Salangri near Bhakra Dam. These paintings include two series, one illustrating anecdotes from Bhagavata Purana and the other breeds of horses. Curiously enough we also find portraits of the Moghul emperors Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb in this collection. This gives an indication that these were painted during the reign of Aurangzeb in the period 1680 – 1690. In this collection are a number of portraits of Rajas, nobles, astrologers, pandits, sadhus and soldiers which indicates that Mankot was also a busy centre of painting.⁴

The 'first' Bhagavata Purana series is in horizontal format illustrating Krishna's exploits with the cow-herds, Krishna tied to a mortar uproots two trees, Krishna stealing the cow-girls' clothes, Krishna killing the horse demon 'Kesi,' Krishna killing Kansa, the killing of the washerman, the hunch-back girl Kubja, caresses Krishna's foot and thigh, Kaljaman pursues Krishna, the birth of Krishna and rejoicings at the birth of Krishna. This great series is the finest and most dramatic in the entire Mankot Raj Collection. It has its original style and use of distinctive idioms.⁵

Following extinction of the state in 1834, the Mankot Family settled in Kutlehr, later a part of the British district Kangra, and in the latter part of the 19th century provided Raja Sir Jai Chand of Lambagraon, Kangra, with two princesses as brides. A Bhagavata Purana modeled on the earlier horizontal one but vertical in format and more summary in execution in strongly Mankot style, may have accompanied the princesses, thus accounting for their presence in the Lambagraon Collection.⁶ A painting depicting 'Krishna lifts Mount Goverdhan' is from this second Bhagavata Purana series.

The third Bhagavata Purana series in vertical format is also in Lambagraon collection, Kangra comprising paintings like 'Krishna steals the cow-girls' clothes, the killing of the washerman and Kaljaman pursues Krishna.

A painting themed 'Krishna celebrates the round dance' is from a fourth Bhagavata Purana series.⁷

Research Design

Every work of art is analyzed and criticized on the basis of art elements. Elements of art are considered as the foundation of any kind of painting. Mainly considering visual art, these elements like line, form, colours, tones, textures and space play vital role for the formation of paintings as well as for their analysis. In this manner Mankot Miniature Paintings of Bhagavata Purana can also be analyzed on the

basis of art elements using observation and descriptive research method.

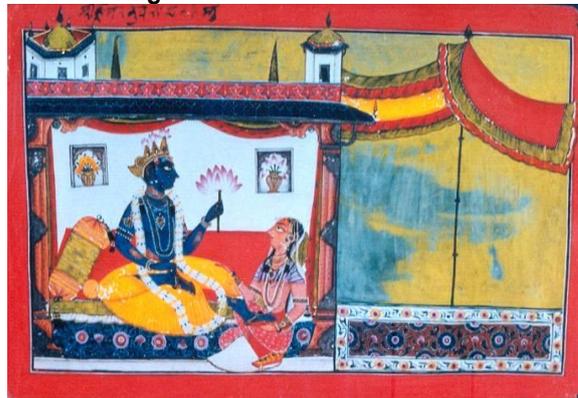
Some of the beautifully illustrated paintings of Bhagavata Purana representing distinctive characteristics of Mankot style are analyzed as follows:-

Rejoicings at the Birth of Krishna



In these painting two cow-herds and six musicians are shown rejoicing at the birth of Krishna. They are playing various musical instruments to express their joy and happiness. The background is in sage green colour. Bright colours like red, blue, green and yellow are used in the costumes of the figures to create a contrastive effect. Painting has red coloured plain border with black and white rules. This painting was first published by Ghose in 1958.⁸

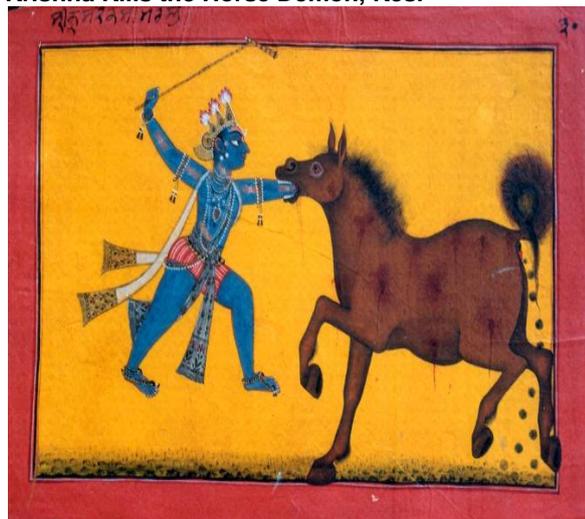
The Hunch-Back Girl, Kubja, Caresses Krishna's Feet and Thigh



In this painting Krishna in yellow dhoti sits on a dark red bed against a white wall, his left leg and thigh caressed by Kubja, who sits before him in mauve blouse and red skirt. Rugs with intricate swirling floral patterns are shown in the painting. The background is in sage green colour. A red and green canopy supported by a single pole and strung on two ropes is also shown.

According to W.G. Archer this painting belongs to the time period of c. 1700 – 1710. It is from a 'first' Bhagavata Purana series in horizontal format. Its average size is 180 x 285mm and with border 205 x 310 mm. The painting is inscribed at the top in takri characters descriptive of incident.

Krishna Kills the Horse Demon, Kesi



In this painting Krishna is shown raising a cowherd's stick in his right hand and plunging his left hand down the throat of the horse demon, Kesi. In its death agony, the horse excretes balls of the dung, which is a spontaneous natural detail repeatedly used by Mankot artists and apparently peculiar to Mankot Painting. The background is in plain yellow colour, beautifully enhancing the effect of the blue and brown coloured main figures in the composition. W.G Archer denoted its time period between c. 1700 - 1710.

Krishna kills Kansa



In this painting Krishna wielding a tusk drawn from one of the two elephants which he and Balrama have slain, grips Kansa by the hair pulling him off his throne. Balrama aids him from the rear. Two attendants stand by the throne and a third faints in fright. Bright colours like orange, red & blue are brilliantly used against the plain yellow background. A type of force is reflected in the depiction of Krishna and Balrama.

According to W.G. Archer, this painting is from a 'first' Bhagavata Purana series painted in horizontal format and belongs to the time period of c. 1700 - 1710.

The Killing of the Washerman



In this painting Krishna and Balaram, having killed one of Kansa's washerman, deposit his senseless corpse in tied condition by the river Jamuna. They are shown distributing garments to five cow-herd boys. In the foreground, the rushing river is shown with swirling white waves. The background is in sage green colour and covered by multiple figures. Painting has red coloured plain border with black and white rules and inscribed at the top in takri characters.

Krishna lifts Mount Goverdhan



In this painting Krishna wearing yellow dhoti lifts Mount Goverdhan on the tip of his right little finger. Balarama in light pinkish skin supports the hill with a thin stick. Nanda wearing Shahjahan-style costume stands to the right, supporting the hill with another stick. Two cowherds, one cowgirl and two cows are also present in the painting. The background is in dark green plain colour with parallel drops of rain shown at the top. The picture correctly follows standard iconography by showing Krishna lifting the hill on his little finger. The picture exemplifies a mannerism, peculiar to Mankot Painting, by which a vital portion of one form is obscured or cut off by the intrusion of a detail drawn from another form. In the painting, the front part of the head of the kneeling cow is cut off by Krishna's left leg.

According to W.G. Archer this painting belongs to the time period of c.1700 – 1710. It is from a 'second' Bhagavata Purana series in vertical format

Krishna Celebrates The Round Dance

In this painting Krishna, a small flute-playing figure in the centre, is surrounded by a ring of dancing cow-girls, a version of himself dancing with each. Around the dancers is a half-circle of lush and frothy tree. A variety of animals including black bucks and hares are shown rushing to the scene. The background is pale brownish grey in colour and gods and musicians are shown in it. Krishna's dark skin is unusually mauve. He wears a yellow dhoti. Trees are in various shades of green.

W.G. Archer denotes its time period between c. 1750 – 1760. It is from a 'fourth' Bhagavata Purana series. Its average size is 274 x 358mm.

Findings

Though these paintings reveal some Basohli influence due to the marriage of Mahipat Dev's daughter to Kirpal Pal of Baohli and the subsequent cultural exchange and closer conjunction between the two states. The Basohli influence is reflected in the greatly enlarged eyes and a far bolder use of colours. However, in other respects the local Mankot style persists which has some distinctive characteristics of its own. The style has been relaxed by a swifter episodic narration. With larger strides and wide-flung arms, the gestural drama in these pictures is spirited. It has the simplicity and innocence of Folk Art specially in the depiction of female faces, which are of special type with long thin strands of hair on the cheek, long sharp nose, receding forehead and unobtrusive chin.

Other significant characteristics are starkly plain backgrounds, often yellow or sage green, canopies tied by ropes which go out of the picture, a special type of high-backed throne, strong and sturdy forms and the avoidance of all rich or intricate details. These paintings lack the too ornate look of the Basohli Paintings. Rugs are severely rectangular with parallel strips instead of being richly patterned. Another trait peculiar to Mankot painters is, that they always portrayed animals in their death agonies or at moments of fright excreting.

The borders of these paintings are red coloured and plain with black and white rules on them.

Each painting is inscribed at the top in 'Takri' characters descriptive of the incident. According to 'Grierson' inscriptions in Takri script in some way on paintings was prevalent in the whole western Pahari region.

Another significant characteristic of these paintings of Bhagavata Purana is their aesthetically arranged colour scheming. Artists had used bright colours like red, yellow, blue and green in abundance. Colours have been used symbolically. Yellow is the colour of spring season, light of sun and ripeness of mangoes. It also symbolizes warmth of Indian Spring Season and eagerness of lovers. Blue is the colour of Lord Krishna and of the clouds. Red is the colour of love. These main colours are used in contrastive manner in Mankot miniatures.

Conclusion

Thus it can be said that these Mankot miniature paintings of Bhagavata Purana have distinctive style of their own. Though they are not so famous in the world of miniature paintings but there is no question mark on their originality and remarkability. These paintings are regarded as historical heritage and emblems of the glorious past.

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