The Guru-Shishya Prampara Among Chiteras of Kangra School of Painting

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Abstract

When humans first entered this world, they must have gazed in wonder, much like an innocent child, at the divine splendour of the vast and vibrant universe surrounding them. As they began to comprehend their existence between the endless expanse of sky and earth, they sought expressions to capture their experiences visually and unknowingly became prehistoric artists. Indian art, at its core, presents a magnificent panorama of human evolution, narrating the gradual transformation of mankind through various historical epochs and reaching its zenith. Among the diverse artistic traditions that evolved through time, the Kangra Miniature painting originated approximately 300 years ago and still maintains a significant position. With its distinctive and enigmatic techniques, vivid application of pigments, bold and lyrical brushwork, and its spiritual power, this art form continues to be a wellspring of inspiration and wonder for art connoisseurs around the globe. The Guru-Shishya Parampara bears immense importance in safeguarding and transferring this art form across generations. This paper investigates how artisans from the Kangra region have preserved this artistic legacy and transmitted cultural stories. It also analyses the exceptional materials and practices employed in the creative procedure and their significance in upholding the stylistic character of this esteemed school of painting.

Keywords: Guru-Shishya Prampara, Chiteras, Kangra School of Painting, Miniature painting,

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Introduction

The *Guru-Shishya Parampara*, an ancient Indian tradition, embodies the sacred relationship between teacher and student while serving as the cornerstone of knowledge transmission throughout Indian civilisation. Tracing back to the Vedic period, this oral and experiential learning methodology has been instrumental in safeguarding and propagating diverse fields of traditional wisdom, including philosophy, painting, music, healing arts, and spiritual disciplines. Differing from formal institutional education, the *Guru-Shishya Parampara* emphasises lifelong guidance, individualised teaching, and the comprehensive development of the disciple morally, spiritually, and intellectually. Within this framework, artistic techniques, creative principles, and cultural symbolism transcend mere instruction, being intimately transmitted through an intimate, immersive, and frequently enduring relationship between master and pupil (Dehejia, 1997). Numerous Indian visual art traditions, including *Madhubani, Pattachitra, Kalamkari,* Kangra Miniature Painting, and temple murals, have thrived within this hereditary framework. This study presents a comprehensive analysis of Kangra Miniature painting as perpetuated through the Guru-Shishya Parampara. It further investigates how this age-old methodology has contributed to maintaining the refined skills, conceptual richness, and divine significance of this art tradition.

In the Kangra dialect, an artist is traditionally referred to as a "*Chitera*", a term derived from variations such as "*Chatrera*," "*Chitrera*," and "*Chitreera*," all signifying "one who creates paintings." This title carries deep reverence in the villages of Kangra, where it is used to honour local artists and their contributions to the region's rich artistic heritage.

Even today, when some wedding preparations are underway and locals seek a "*chitera*" to create sacred ceremonial paintings, such as *Likhnu or Bangadwari*, they are seen asking wayfarers in the local Kangri dialect:

Adeyo Chatrerayan de Gharyo rasta eh gaya honga? Darbajje likhne yo sai daini hi?

(Which way leads to Chitera's house? We need him to create the ceremonial doorway painting.)

The request, though simple, echoes the enduring cultural importance of the chitera in the fabric of local life. Similarly, when villagers see the *Chiteras* working, they often inquire: "

Likhnuan banane ala Chitera kuttuhu te aya? Rajoli te, ki Samlotiya te, ki Kotkuala te, ki Chadhiya te?

(From where has the Chitera come? Is he from Rajoli, Samloti, Kotkuala, or Chadhi?)

The four villages, Rajoli, Samloti, Kotkhwal, and Chadiya, hold special significance in the world of art, having been home to some of the most celebrated "*chiteras*", including the world-renowned Nainsukh and his descendants. These villages have played a crucial role in preserving and passing down the rich tradition of Kangra miniature painting through *Guru-Shishya Parampara*. However, there are *chiteras* from Kotkhwal who are not associated with the Kangra Kalam style. Instead, they are primarily known for their expertise in making ritualistic artefacts for *Rali Puja* and ceremonial paintings like *Likhnu*. These *Likhnu* or *Bandwari* paintings, created by Kotkhwal artists, also find mention in Kangra's traditional wedding songs. For instance:

Chautha Bhadoha Dehre Je Paya
Dehre Jo Rakhiya Likhai
Onadiyan Saiyan Mangal Gayo
Krishne Ne Bansi Bajai

The *Dehra, Likhnu, and Bandwari* mentioned in the folk song are ceremonial paintings created by *chiteras on* walls or doorways as a part of wedding rituals. Similarly, another traditional song that highlights the significance of *chiteras* in Kangra culture is:

Are Dudhalie, Pare Dudhalie
Sun Kudiye Diye Mou
Sunya Teriya Kudiya De
Range De Din Aaye,
Chaye De Din Aaye,
Viyahe De Din Aaye

This folk song describes that before any wedding is to be finalized in Kangra, the village priest is requested to fix a date for a particular ritual called '*Rang*'. In this ceremony, various tasks are undertaken, such as dyeing the ceremonial thread (*paga rangna*) and dyeing of the '*doriyaans*' (threads). During these rituals, the *chiteras* are also called upon to paint and decorate houses with *likhnus*. So, *chiteras* are a vital part of all the auspicious ceremonies.

Fig. 1: Pictures of Painter Nain Sukh ji and Manaku ji

The tradition of portraiture, known as *Shabih Chitra*, in the Kangra style can be traced back to Pandit Seu and his sons, Nainsukh and Manaku, as documented in historical records. Some of these *Shabih* paintings bear inscriptions in the *Tankari* script, which reflects the artistic and cultural influences of the period. Notably, these inscriptions often include the term "*Mosabbir,*" the Persian word for painter, highlighting the cultural exchange between Persian and Indian artistic traditions. At times, the local term "*Chitera*" is also found inscribed on contemporary paintings, reinforcing the deep-rooted connection between Kangra's artists and their historical legacy.

Several scholars, including Anand Kumar Swami, W.G. Archer, Kailash Khanna Lal Bala, M.S. Randhawa, Deshlal Grey, O.C. Ganguly, N.C. Mehta and B.N. Goswamy have conducted extensive research on the Kangra School of Painting. They have provided profound insights into these artistic traditions. Their studies highlight the significant role of Pandit Seu and his descendants in preserving and advancing this art form. B.N. Goswamy, in *Pahari Masters* and *Nainsukh of Guler*, provides evidence that Pandit Seu was among the earliest artists to establish a Guru-Shishya lineage in Kangra. Karl Khandalvala, in *Pahari Miniature Paintings*, also supports this claim and mentions that Seu's family migrated from Guler to Kangra. According to Anil Raina, the son of Chandulal Raina, one of the last master artists of Kangra miniature paintings, Pandit Seu's family originally belonged to Kashmiri Pandits, although in Kangra, they came to be identified with the

Dhiman or Tarkhan caste. However, even today, the family continues to use "Raina" after their names, a title traditionally associated with Kashmiri Pandits. Gulabu Ram Ji and Chandu Lal Raina Ji are regarded as the last great painters of the Kangra School of Art.

An interesting thing to be mentioned here is that just as musicians belong to different gharanas, each defined by its unique musical traditions, painters from various families in the Kangra Valley also developed distinctive artistic styles. B.N. Goswamy, in his book *Pahari Masters*, draws a direct comparison between these artistic lineages, stating: "I believe that the family at its own Kalam in painting, much as a Gharana of musicians had its style in music."

In April 1905, when the catastrophic earthquake struck the valley, it claimed the lives of many artists and threatened the survival of this artistic heritage. W.G. Archer, in his book *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, notes:

> The usual date given as the end of the Kangra Valley School is the great earthquake of 1905, which destroyed the fortress-palace of Tira Sujanpur and turned it into a horrible ruin as it now is. There is no doubt that many artists were killed by it, but when the writer visited Kangra in 1929, Nandu, Huzuri, Gulabu Ram, and Lachman Das were still working.

Gulabu Ram Ji, associated with the Samloti Gharana, passed on his artistic mastery to his disciple, O.P. Tock. His legacy lives on through his exquisite paintings that still adorn the main doors of Kangra's Bajreshwari Devi temple. Chandu Lal Raina Ji, hailing from Rajol, mentored Dhani Ram Ji, who continues to uphold and carry forward this artistic tradition. Dhani Ram Ji shares about his mentor:

> Despite being an artist, Chandu Lal Raina Ji also worked as a jeweller until the age of sixty. He made immense contributions to the revival of the Kangra School of Art. With the support of scholars like Karl Khandalavala, M.S. Randhawa, and O.C. Ganguly, and with assistance from the Himachal Pradesh Government, he established the first-ever Guru-Shishya tradition centre at Rait in 1971. This centre was not limited to just his family, but it provided training to many local youths as well. What is even more heartening is that, for the first time, even the daughters of the family were encouraged to learn the traditional Kangra painting techniques there.

In earlier times, women were primarily involved in preparing materials like colours and paper rather than painting. Families hesitated to train them as artists, fearing that after marriage, they might share exclusive artistic techniques with their in-laws, which would lead to the dilution of their unique style. B.N. Goswami, in *Pahari Masters*, writes:

> Oral tradition among the painters living today generally insists on 'family secrets' of painting not being passed on to the daughters, for fear that these would then be available to the painter's family into which they married.

Before this, historical records mention only one female artist in Pahari painting. Karl Khandalvala, in *Pahari Miniature Paintings*, briefly notes her existence:

> A woman artist of Kangra who died at a very advanced age in the early years of this century. The then-living Kangra artist spoke of her art in terms of great respect. I never saw her paintings, but I met an old Amritsar dealer who had seen her. She is the only reputed Pahadi woman painter.

Chandu Lal Raina Ji's efforts led to the inclusion of female artists in Kangra painting. Today, nearly fifty women painters contribute to its preservation, with around ten actively practising the traditional style. His other prominent disciples include Satprakash Raina, Anil Raina, Pritam Chand, Joginder Singh, Dhani Ram, and Mukesh Dhiman, who are all carrying forward this artistic tradition. Along with these artists, Padma Shri Vijay Sharma Ji and Om Sujanpuri Ji are also actively engaged in preserving and practising this tradition.

Early Steps of Young Chiteras in Kangra's Artistic Legacy

In bygone eras, the creative path of apprentices commenced as young as five or six years. The pupils would assume a cross-legged position, balancing a wooden writing board (*Takhti*), locally termed *Phatti,* upon their laps. Under the vigilant guidance of their grandfather, father, or uncles, they would meticulously trace patterns. The *Phatti*, fashioned from mango wood, underwent repeated cleaning throughout the day to maintain a flawless surface. Subsequently, a golden *Gachi* layer was spread before each training session. For inscription, a *kajal* (charcoal) mixture, mellowed with jaggery or sugar, served their needs, resulting in a refined, lustrous finish. After moistening the wet *Phatti* with liquid, artists would employ their digits and thumbs to delicately polish the area and establish boundaries. This refined technique of moulding the dampened material with fingertips earned the designation "*Shisha*".

Foundational Training: Curriculum for Young Painters

The instructional program for aspiring painters' foundational training was determined by their teachers. Beginning with fundamental elements, students concentrated on illustrating eyes, ears, hands, feet, blossoms, and foliage. Following months of dedicated study, they advanced to rendering structures like dwellings, suspended seating, and decorative features,

then moved to depicting wildlife, including peacocks, deer, elephants, cattle, and similar creatures. Ultimately, they mastered full figure representation. Concurrently, apprentice artists developed their abilities through careful observation of their instructors' methods. Occasionally, they supported women relatives by performing duties like colour preparation and surface refinishing. With growing proficiency in technical skills, they slowly assumed duties including artwork enhancement and canvas preparation. They skilfully built up and bonded delicate *Siyalkoti* paper layers and treated them with binding agents to create appropriate surfaces for painting. Throughout their development, their existence merged completely with the Kangra School of Art, where pigments and implements transcended mere utensils to form essential elements of their upbringing and creative development.

Sources of Spiritual Knowledge and Contemporary Artistic Wisdom

Kangra miniature painting is deeply rooted in the depiction of divine and mythical figures such as Shiva, Durga, Krishna, and Ram, which leaves a lasting impression on the minds of young artists. Growing up surrounded by these sacred images, the painters developed not only artistic skills but also a spiritual side to their personalities. They observed their gurus engaged in meditation and religious activities. This made them learn that a calm and focused mind was essential for the creative process. They also began their practice every time by first sketching Lord Ganesha, a ritual believed to invoke wisdom and remove obstacles. This act was not just symbolic but a foundational step in their artistic discipline. In addition to mastering traditional painting techniques, the disciples were also exposed to historical and literary knowledge through bedtime stories narrated by their elders. These stories enriched their understanding of the themes they would later depict. Art mentors also trained the disciples in writing inscriptions using the *Tankri* script. During that time, the *Tankri* script was widely used, and its knowledge was considered essential. Village scholars and priests played a crucial role in imparting this knowledge, as Kangra was home to eight to nine prominent artistic styles. Artists had to visit these scholars to learn the language as well.

The Daily Routine and Curriculum of Young Artists

Before beginning their day's work, young artists were required to bathe and pray. This routine cultivated a calm and focused mind essential for their creative endeavours. Alongside their artistic training, they were also supposed to assist with household duties such as caring for elders, fetching water, running errands, and engaging in agricultural activities. They would also accompany their *gurus* (mentors) on pilgrimages and family visits. This exposed them to different regional art styles and inspired new techniques. Upon returning, discussions were also held to deepen their understanding of art. Dhani Ram Ji recalls,

> While learning from my Guru Chandu Lal Raina Ji, I would clean the training room, fill the water container, and wash the brushes before starting the work. We, as apprentices, would also assist in applying colours to sketches made by our *gurus*, carefully following the inscriptions that guided us on colours. And whenever a disciple mastered a particular technique, the *guru* would entrust them with specialised tasks within a composition.

Even today, this practice continues as an essential part of the artistic training. In earlier times, young *chiteras* would accompany senior artists to royal courts and observe firsthand how to navigate the world of patronage. Securing the favour of a king was a coveted goal, yet it was no easy task as it often demanded building relationships with influential members of the court.

With hopes of becoming court painters themselves, these young artists worked with great dedication. They took part in competitions, showcased their talent, and even sold their paintings to gain insight into the commercial side of art. One of the most difficult hurdles they faced was competing against well-established court painters, whose reputation and connections often made the path to recognition even more challenging

Tracing or *Tapai*

Earlier, craftsmen produced their artworks on goat or sheep hides, yet gradually shifted to employing *Siyalkoti* paper as their primary material. An essential duty entrusted to novice painters was to reproduce original compositions with accuracy. One prevalent technique involved spreading mustard oil on delicate paper sheets, positioning an existing sketch beneath, and precisely transferring the subtle contours onto the fresh canvas.

Another technique included reversing the sketch, darkening the lines with charcoal or *kohl*, and then using a fine needle to transfer the design onto fresh paper. This process is known as "tracing" in English. However, this was permitted to students only after they had acquired proficiency in freehand sketching first. It was ensured they understood the foundational principles of form and composition. Tracing not only helped maintain stylistic consistency but also significantly reduced the time required for creating complex compositions. This technique continues to be practised even today.

The Drawing technique of the Kangra School of Art

After the selection of an appropriate *Siyalkoti* paper, it was first placed on a marble slab. Then its surface was rubbed with a *hakik* (crystal stone) to make it flat and smooth. This also helped in moving brushes seamlessly. Next, they created sketches using materials like *lac* (sealing wax) or kajal (*kohl)*. Once the sketch was complete, they applied a thin layer of *khadiya mitti* (clay) to smooth the surface, though this step was optional. Afterwards, they filled in the colours and allowed them to dry before rubbing the surface again for smoothness. If needed, they refined the sketch further. Finally, the artist applied a layer of *pardaj* (a type of varnish or finish) using fine tools, such as a delicate glass, to enhance the artwork.

Materials and techniques used by artisans of the Kangra School of Art:

Siyalkoti Paper (a type of handmade paper): This type of paper is handmade and is typically used for traditional Kangra paintings. It is prepared using a process similar to traditional *bahi khate* (ledger accounts) methods. As the name of the paper suggests, this is typically prepared in places like *Siyalkot*, a place in Pakistan, in the present time.

Fig. 2: Drawing facial features on the wooden slate

Vasli (a type of handmade paper): Nowadays, handmade paper from Rajasthan is used by artists for painting. The texture of this paper is similar to that of *Sialkoit* paper. However, it has a slightly darker tone compared to *Sialkot* paper.

Fig. 3: Vasli paper is placed on a piece of marble with a conch for polishing

Brushes (*Tulikain):* Only handmade brushes are used for painting on these fine handmade paper paintings. Artist's craft small brushes using the hairs from a squirrel's tail. The tips of these brushes are shaped to resemble a single hair, which makes them extremely delicate. This helps in maintaining a unique rhythmic flow in the paintings. The squirrel hairs are carefully tied to bamboo sticks to create these fine brushes. In the Kangra school of painting, artists use five types of colours, including minerals, chemicals, natural, organic, and metallic colours. Each type has its specific method of preparation and application.

Mineral Colours

Khadia (White Chalk): *Khadia* is generally found in stone form. Artists grind it with water using a traditional *silbatta*

Fig. 4: Brushes and palette used for painting

(stone grinder) placed in a tub. This process allows the powdered chalk to settle in the water. The water is then carefully drained, and the sediment is collected. When required, this sediment is mixed with a binding agent (*saresh gond*), filtered, and used for painting. Today, *Khadia* is also available in powdered form in Jaipur markets.

Geru (Red Ochre): Red ochre has been used since prehistoric times in art. The purification process of *geru* is like that of *khadia.*

Harmunji: This is available in powdered form. It is widely used on house walls. It is mixed with water and *saresh* gum, filtered, and then used.

Ramraj: It is found in both stone and soil forms. The stone is rubbed on a grinding stone with water, filtered, and then mixed with saresh gum for use.

Multani Mitti: This is usually available in powdered form at a grocer's shop. It is mixed with *saresh* gum and used.

Hara Batta: This is a red pigment found in stone fragments. It is rubbed with water on a grinding stone, filtered, and then mixed with gum for use.

Lajvard: Also known as "Lapis Lazuli," it comes in two shades: light blue and dark blue. This pigment has also been mentioned in ancient Indian literature. Originally, it is sourced from Persia. Stones with minimal white streaks are used for making colour. The stone is first crushed in a mortar and pestle, and the powder is ground for 3–4 days with water and lemon juice. It is then filtered and mixed with gum for use.

Danafarang: It is a red-coloured substance. It exists in the form of a stone. The process to purify it and make it usable involves methods similar to those of the previous one *lajvard*.

Sangraf: It is also known in English as *Hingul*. It is a red-coloured substance that comes in two types: *Roomi* and *Katha*. The Katha variety resembles *Geru* in its appearance, while Roomi is more widely used in painting due to the presence of mercury in it. The stone is broken into small pieces and ground into a fine powder in a mortar. To this, sheep's milk and water are mixed and ground together. The mixture is left in the mortar overnight. The next morning fat of the milk is separated from the top, and lemon juice is added to be ground again. The water is then drained off and combined with gum to be used.

Harital is a yellow-coloured stone that comes in two types: one is known as *Godanti or Varki Harital*. Chiteras use only Varki Harital in paintings. It is ground using a mixture of *Thuhar* milk and water. After draining the water, lemon juice is added to the paste and ground again. The mixture is then left to sit overnight. The next day, it is filtered, combined with gum to be used as colour.

Surma (a traditional eye kohl) is also used by artists for painting purposes. It is made by grinding lemon juice and *kharal* water in a mortar. After grinding, it is mixed with gum to create a dark, smudge-resistant colour, which is then used in paintings.

Chemical Colours

Zinc Safeda: This colour is prepared through a special blowing technique. It is available in the market in the form of a powder. To prepare it for use, it is ground with water and a kind of burning gum in a mortar. After the mixture is filtered, it is ready for application.

Vermilion: It is sold in the market as a powder. It is quite heavy. It is prepared by mixing sheep's milk and lemon juice and then grinding it in a mortar. It is then left soaked in water overnight. The next day, a few drops of *saresh* are added to be used.

Gau Goli: It is the most cherished colour of the Kangra School of painting. This is yellow, and preparing it in its

purest form is quite challenging. This process of making this colour involves collecting cow's milk, extracting cream, and then refining it through intricate methods.

Piyodi: The yellow powder called *piyodi* is mixed in a mortar with water and *saresh* (glue), ground thoroughly, and then strained before being applied.

Jangal Firozi Hara: It is prepared by mixing copper filings with ammonium chloride (Sal) and burying the mixture in an earthen vessel covered with clay for some days. When it is taken out, it yields a rich crimson colour which is then mixed with *saresh* (glue) for use.

Kajal or Kohl is used as a substitute for black colour. Its preparation process is elaborate, as detailed in our ancestral literature and passed down as a part of our heritage. A lamp filled with sesame oil is lit between two bricks and covered with a plate from above. After the lamp burns out, the soot collects on the plate. This soot is then gathered and mixed with *saresh* (glue) for use.

Vegetable Colours

Dali Neel: This is a deep blue colour. It has been a part of Indian painting since ancient times. It is available in the market as small blue chunks, which are relatively lightweight. To use, it is mixed with *saresh* (glue).

Lac: The process of making colour from lac is unique. When lac is obtained from the market, it is combined with Pahadi *Lodh* and *Suhaga* (borax) in an earthen vessel and boiled in water to produce a deep red colour. Adding cotton to this mixture results in bundles, which artists traditionally keep with themselves; it is called *chukha*. If *Pahadi Lodh, Suhaga*, and lac are boiled in a copper vessel, the resulting colour is henna, and if it is boiled in an iron vessel, the same combination produces a violet colour.

Cactus Dye: A beautiful pink pigment is extracted from the cactus plant to be used as a pink colour.

Organic Colours

This type of insect is found on Kekti (*Pandanus tectorius*) trees. To extract this colour, it is tied in a muslin cloth along with *Pahadi Lodh* and soaked in water overnight. The next day, the mixture is gently heated over a low flame, during which it releases a pinkish pigment used by artists for colouring.

Sonkirva: This is an insect that flies in the sky. Its wings are pasted in jewellery to create designs.

Conch and Shells: Conch and shells found in the sea are burned over a fire. Afterwards, they are ground thoroughly in a mortar with *saresh* (glue). The mixture is then strained and applied as a substitute for white colour.

Saresh (Glue): This is commonly found in the market in the form of flakes. It is made from dead animals' hides, tendons, or other parts. The flakes of the glue are boiled in water, and the resulting solution is mixed with to create colours.

Babool Gum: *Babool* gum is also boiled in water and mixed with colours.

Metallic Colours: These colours, similar to gold and silver, are available in both leaf and powder forms and are commonly used for painting and decoration.

Artists' Materials and Practices: Painters traditionally keep their colours in small vessels made of materials such as seashells, coconut shells, and earthen pots. They store their entire set of tools in wooden boxes called *sandookchi.* In these boxes, some naphthalene balls are also stored.

Fig. 5: A drawing of Ganesha drawn on the wooden slate for practice

Various traditions of wall painting developed regionally across India, each reflecting distinct cultural backgrounds, artistic practices, and artistic responsiveness. The wall paintings of Kangra, marked by their realistic style, subtle linework, and mythological themes, stand in contrast yet share common ground with other folk mural traditions

Fig. 6: A picture of Wooden Slate (Takhti and Gachi)

like Madhubani, Warli, and Pattachitra. While Kangra murals decked the royal palaces or temples under the patronage of kings, traditions like Madhubani painting in Bihar appeared as an indigenous, community-driven practice, mainly made by women on the mud walls of their homes to illustrate mythological narratives and social events. Similarly, the Warli paintings of Maharashtra rely on geometric simplicity to relate tribal life and rituals, different pointedly from Kangra's naturalistic detailing but sharing the mural medium as a form of collective cultural expression (Rao, 2023).

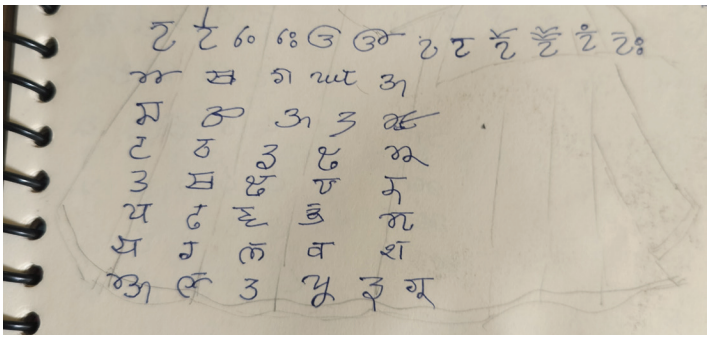

Fig. 7: Alphabets written in Tankri script

The *Pattachitra* tradition of Odisha and West Bengal, with its complex borders and stylised religious themes, also reverberates with Kangra painting in terms of devotional content, though it follows a flatter, more attractive aesthetic (Saha, 2021).

A key cohesion among these diverse traditions is the *Guru–Shishya Parampara* (teacher-disciple tradition), which factually ensured the dissemination of artistic knowledge and technique.

Fig. 8: A practice drawing of a tree drawn by a Young Chitera

This lineage-based learning system allowed technical elements and thematic practices to be passed down orally and practically within families or close-knit communities (Raha, 2023). However, with changing socio-economic conditions, loss of patronage, and the rise of formal art institutions, this intimate mode of propagation has weakened across all these traditions. Recent studies highlight how governmental, institutional, and non-governmental efforts, along with the use of modern platforms, are being leveraged to document, recuperate, and spread these art forms for future generations (Panda, 2023).

Conclusion

The traditional wall paintings of Kangra stand as a vivid testament to the region's rich cultural and artistic heritage. Rooted in the devotional, mythological, and courtly traditions of the Western Himalayas, these murals reflect not only the aesthetic sensibilities of the Pahari region but also the social, religious, and historical contexts in which they were created. Although overshadowed by the

globally celebrated Kangra miniature paintings, the wall paintings reveal an equally sophisticated visual language marked by bold compositions, expressive linework, and vibrant natural pigments. In contemporary Kangra, the tradition of the Kangra School of painting continues through the guru-shishya (teacher-student) tradition, which remains vibrant in regions like Kangra and Mandi. Attracting increasing attention, this art form has now been incorporated into the PG syllabus by Himachal Pradesh University, which is a remarkable step by the university in preserving and promoting this unique cultural heritage.

Historically, the knowledge and techniques of this mural tradition were transmitted through the Guru–Shishya Parampara—a deeply personal, oral, and practical mode of learning where the master artist imparted skills, stylistic nuances, and philosophical understanding to the disciple. This intimate chain of transmission ensured not only technical proficiency but also the continuity of regional aesthetics and cultural values across generations. However, with the decline of royal patronage, socio-economic changes, and the advent of modern art education systems, this traditional mode of learning has gradually eroded. As a result, the wall painting tradition of Kangra faces the dual threat of physical deterioration and the loss of living knowledge systems.

In conclusion, the traditional wall paintings of Kangra are a vital yet often overlooked chapter of Indian art history. They deserve greater scholarly attention and systematic conservation efforts. Furthermore, initiatives aimed at reviving the *Guru Shishya* lineage, providing institutional support, and creating new platforms for training young artists. This can play a crucial role in ensuring that this unique art form continues to thrive. The future of Kangra wall painting depends not only on its preservation but also on its reintegration into contemporary cultural narratives, encouraging communities to reclaim and celebrate their artistic heritage.

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