

## A REVIEW OF BASOHLI STYLE IN INDIAN PAINTING

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*Banaras*

Basohli, which is a corrupt form of the Sanskrit Vishvasthali, was an ancient state, situated on the river Ravi in the present state of Jammu and Kashmir. A style of painting developed here in the fourth quarter of the 17th century, the first dated examples of which are from the time of Raja Kirpal Pal (1678-93). With the help of three dated examples—the illustrated leaves of *Rasamanjari* (1695, figs. 1-2), the *Gita Govinda* (1730) and the *Ramayana* drawings (1816)—a systematic evolution of the style can be set up. In this article I shall also discuss the *Ragamala* series, but the *Ramayana* drawings prepared at Basohli for Raja Bhupendra Pal in 1816 do not come within our scope as they are painted in the late Guler-Kangra style.

In the beginning of the 20th century, when dealers first showed paintings of the Basohli style, they called them "Tibetis" (Paintings done in Tibet). Yet we possess a definite knowledge of Tibetan Painting, mostly obtained from the Thankas which preserve a continuity of style through the centuries, and in expression as well as in subject matter they can be clearly distinguished from Basohli paintings.

These pictures were called "Basohli paintings" for the first time in the *Archaeological Survey Report* for 1918-19, published in 1921: "The additions to the Archaeological Section of the Central Museum, Lahore, consisted of a series of old paintings of the Basohli School, from his study of which the Curator comes to the conclusion that (1) The Basohli School is possibly of pre-Mughal origin and that (2) the so-called 'Tibeti' pictures are nothing but late productions of this school."<sup>1</sup> Ajit Ghose, while examining this statement, rightly showed that Basohli painting was not a pre-Mughal art style.<sup>2</sup> But by the time Ajit Ghose published Basohli miniatures in *Rupam*, O. C. Gangoly had already classified these paintings under Basohli School, and had distinguished them from those of the later Kangra pictures.<sup>3</sup>

It seems plausible to suggest that a number of centres, such as Basohli, Mankot, Chamba, or Nurpur had been producing paintings in a traditional form with local variations when in the 17th century many such centres all over north India were blossoming forth from the semi-folk level into court traditions. The exact nature of the

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1. *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report for 1918-19 Pt. I: Calcutta, 1921, p. 32*

2. Ajit Ghose, "The Basohli School of Rajput Painting." *Rupam*, no. 37, 1929, p. 6-17.

3. O. C. Gangoly, *Masterpieces of Rajput Painting*, pl. XIX

parent style from which the different schools including Basohli style emanated cannot be determined because of the complete absence of known materials. Whether we call it "Basohli" or something else, it does not necessarily mean painting restricted to that particular centre but designates a whole region. In current terminology, "Basohli" stands for the decorative traditional style of paintings in the hills, with its seats in Mankot, Jasrota, Chamba, Nurpur, Bilaspur, Kulu, and Mandi, each representing local forms of "Basohli".

Basohli painting was already an established art style in the late seventeenth century. Even the earliest dated examples (1695) presuppose its existence as a fully developed art expression at least a few generations before. For it is not primitiveness of the forms which mark the scenes but a fully matured decorative tradition, meaningfully applied and ripe. Only by assuming that in the last quarter of the seventeenth century the tradition was at its highest, as evidenced by the examples, and that after this full maturity the scenes become more elaborated, a natural process in the development of style, does Basohli painting fall into place. The profuse production of the earliest known examples also suggests that there was a regular *atelier* or *ateliers* rather than its being a style limited to individual painters.

We may consider the situation by means of a group of paintings limited to four or five illustrations, close in style to the earlier leaves of the *Rasamanjari*. A painting from this group in the collection of G. K. Kanoria (fig. 3), probably an illustration to an as yet unidentified *nayika* text, shows a stage prior to the period of Kirpal Pal. Other possible examples from the same series are: girl with veena and deer, the famous "Vihini" in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and another reported with an art dealer at Lucknow. This series of paintings may be considered the finest creation of the Basohli school in certain respects. They retain the decorative qualities of the school, yet the traditional treatment of human figures and of nature are reinterpreted by the painter. Men<sup>4</sup> and women and the trees are elegantly shown. The movements of the human figures are slow but more dignified. There is always a greater emphasis on richness of landscape. Yet it is in the careful spacing of each specimen that the painter shows a discriminative taste. For example, the waves of scalloped clouds in the Boston Museum example, shown with a keen sense of colour pattern, make a suitable margin to the main scene. The colour sense itself is slightly modified; although preference for strong tonalities prevails in this group, the contrasting compartments of colours of the *Rasamanjari* illustrations are avoided. Moreover, by introducing complimentary tones, harmonious effects or an atmosphere is created.

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4. Only known in an example from Lucknow.

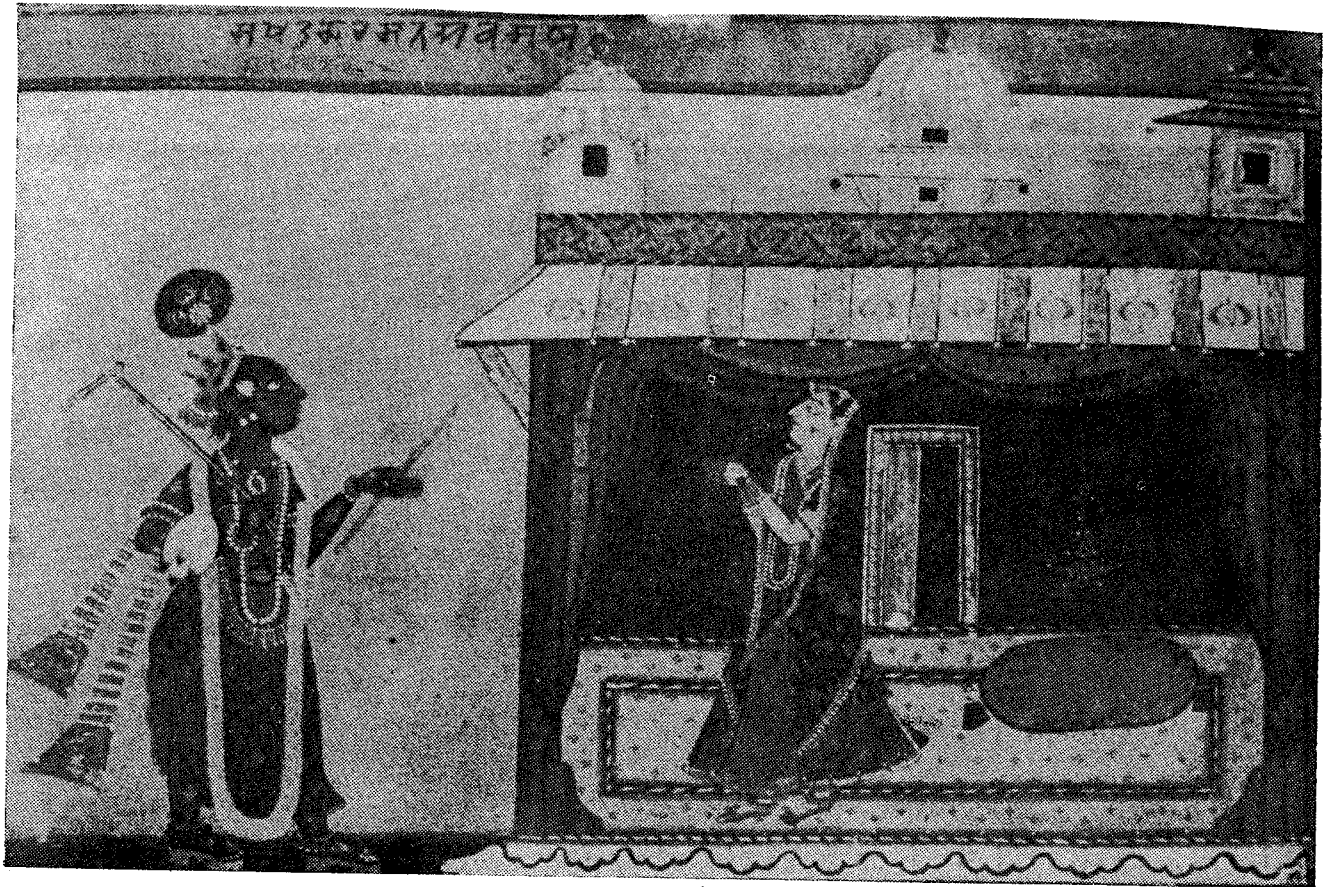
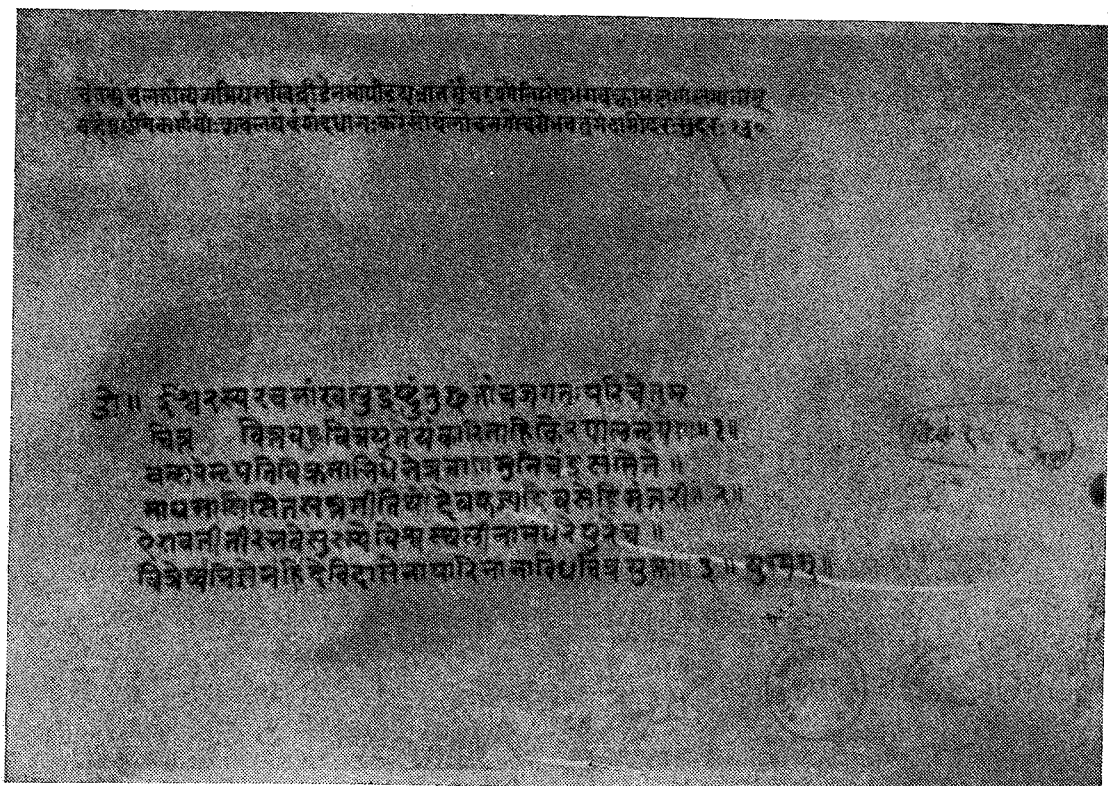
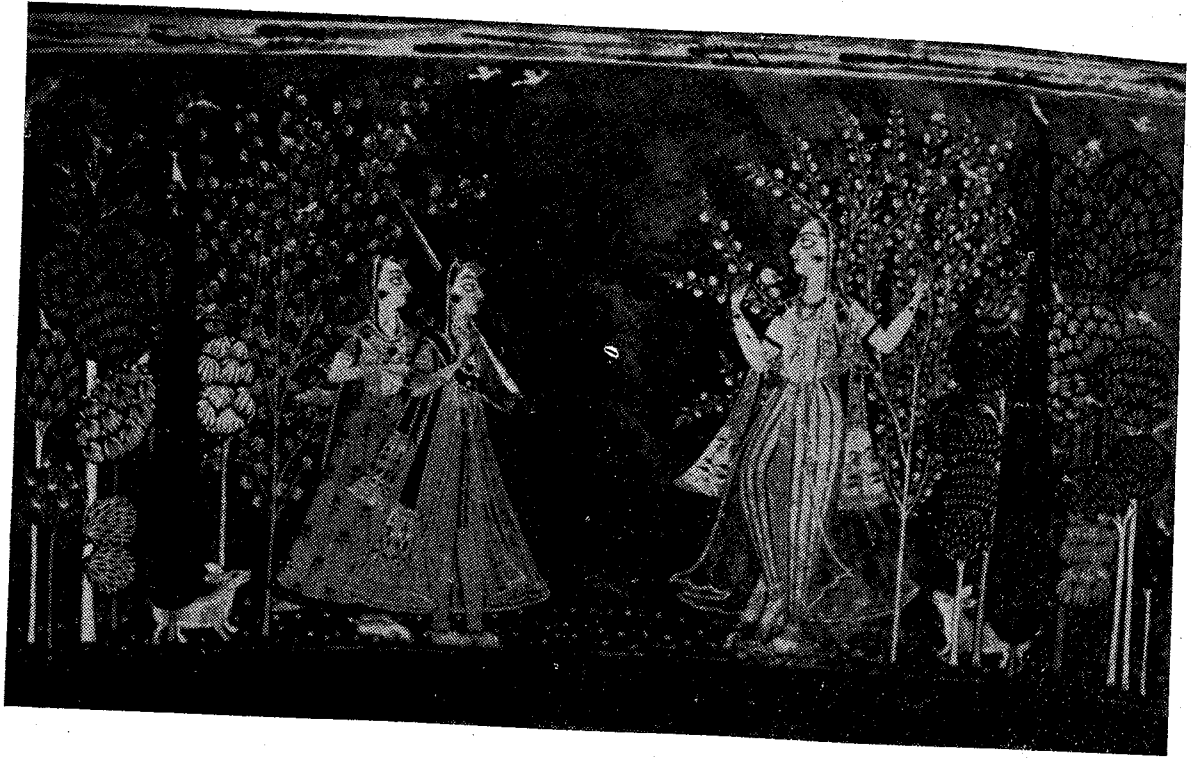


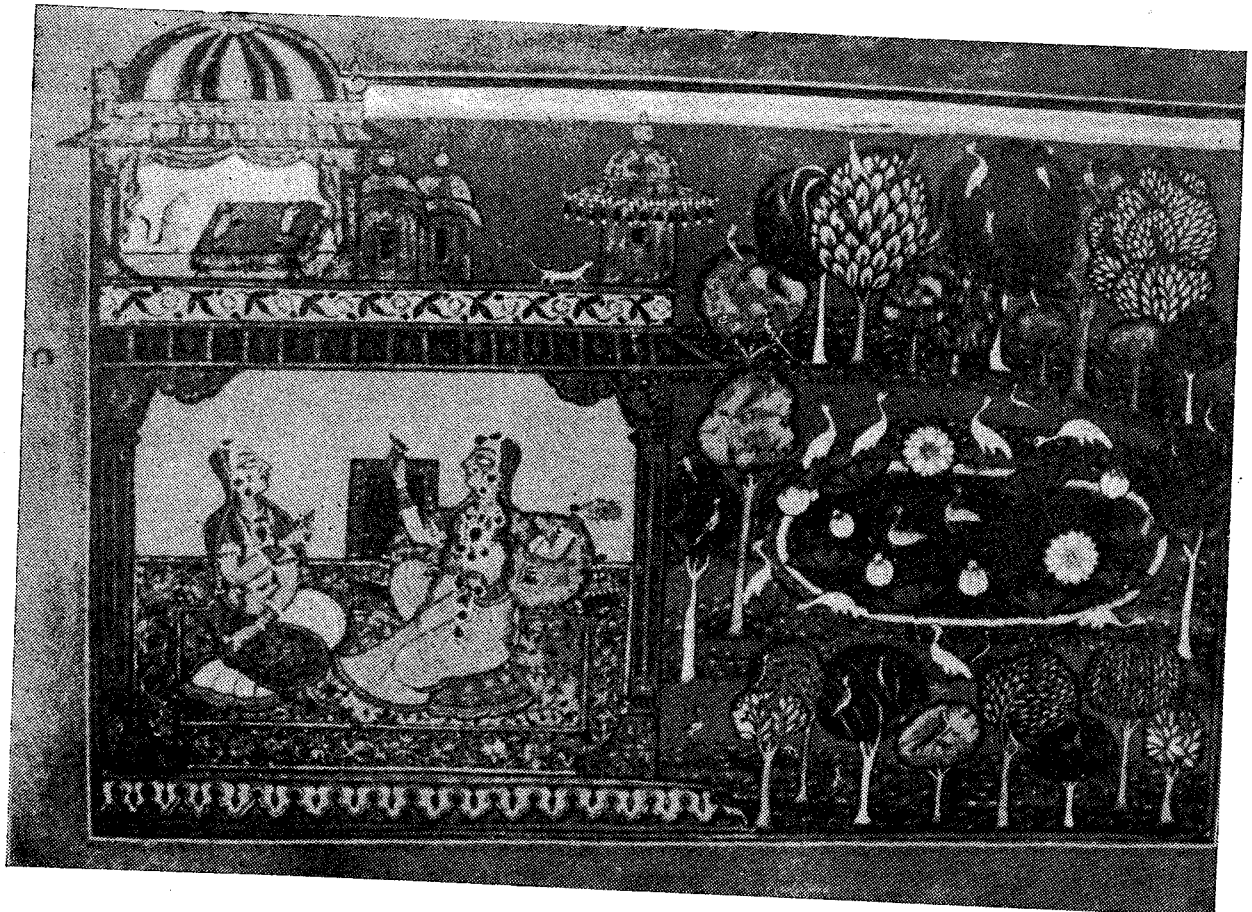
Figure 1. The colophon page of Rasamanjari, dated VS 1773 (AD1 695), Basohli. [Collection: Bharat Kala Bhavan, (BKB), Banaras.]



2. Reverse side of the above painting (Fig. 1) with inscription giving the date.



3. Nayikas. late 17th cent. [Coll. : G.K. Kanoria, Calcutta.]



4. An illustration from Rasamanjari group "A", ca. 1680.  
[Coll.: Victoria and Albert Museum, London.]

## RASAMANJARI

The *Rasamanjari* series, which was painted for Raja Kirpal Pal, is the earliest dated material known from Basohli. The *Rasamanjari*, by Bhanudutta, is a Sanskrit love lyric and seems to have been popular among the elite. A number of illustrated sets of *Rasamanjari* in Rajasthani style are available, showing its prevalence among the Rajasthani schools. But at least three elaborate series of paintings of this theme were produced in the hills, a fact which suggests that Pahari painters were more familiar with the text. These three *Rasamanjari* sets are divided among different collections: group "A" is in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Dogra Art Gallery in Jammu, S. P. S. Museum, Srinagar, and the Punjab Museum in Chandigarh; group "B" is divided between the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Banaras, and the National Museum in New Delhi. The third group, which is stylistically about twenty years later than the other two, is divided among the British Museum in London, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Kasturbhai Lalbhai collection in Ahmedabad. This last series is generally ascribed to Nurpur.

There is a question whether all the *Rasamanjari* miniatures in the above-mentioned collections of groups "A" and "B" are from the same set, the one prepared for Raja Kirpal Pal, or whether there were two or more sets. Karl Khandalavala suggests that the Boston collection of group "A" paintings represents an earlier phase of the style than the 1695 pages (group "B"), which is reasonable on a stylistic basis. All the pictures in group "A" are alike in their warm colour schemes and portrayal of facial features, dress and ornament (fig. 4). The "B" group leaves in Baharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (including the inscribed leaf) were probably not done by the same artists since their facial type differs and the human figures are shorter (fig. 2 and 3). A careful comparison between groups "A" and "B" clearly shows the evolution of the style. The gradual move to subdued realism had already started and the Basohli style was slowly drifting to simplification and loss of ornamentation. Group "A" shows a richness in its foliage types with trees in greater variety and of different colours. The treatment of undulating land is introduced to relieve the otherwise solid colour patches. These stretches are normally shown in moss green trimmed with tiny flowers. These flower designs were decidedly derived directly or indirectly from Mughal painting, yet are only an impression of the Mughal style rather than copies. A. K. Coomaraswamy described group "A" thus: "This series is characterized by strong colour, with red borders on to which the picture intrudes, by the use of fragments of beetle wings to represent jewelry, and by the peculiar character of the architecture, with turrets, paneled doors, latticed windows and plinths ending in grotesque heads. . Krishna

and Radha or Mahadeva and Uma play the parts of hero and heroine.”<sup>5</sup> Flowering trees appear in varieties; some can be identified with mangoes, Asoka trees and weeping willows. They appear either in exuberant, fully developed forms or in diminutive sizes.” Some of the symbolic representations of trees have broad leaves which take on oval form and bend slightly at the top. These characteristics may be traced back to the representations of trees in the later Apabhramsa and Sultanate style. Wherever the artist had to paint a specified tree type (as mentioned in the *slokas*) he successfully expressed his own idealized tradition; in a painting published in *Painting of India*,<sup>6</sup> the *ber* tree is painted in a naturalistic manner. Its trunk and small leaves with tiny berries give the impression of that particular tree by an artist who was equally clever in painting landscapes. In group “A” paintings artists preferred to paint backgrounds with colourful trees and flowering plants, while in group “B” artists had become more sophisticated and their tree types were not so rich in variety, their colours not so brilliant.

Group “B” shows a developed type of architecture. All buildings are double storeyed with a lot of elaboration in *shikharas* and cornices while in group “A” architecture is overladen with decorative designs in different colours to give an impression of inlay work. The designs are bold and of unending variety.

The clear-cut distinction between these two styles can also be seen in facial treatment, as M. S. Randhawa suggests: “In these paintings figures are squat, the nose is aquiline, and the facial formula is different. However, these paintings do not duplicate those in the first series. Maybe they belong to the same series. Surely a number of artists were employed by Kirpal Pal, to illustrate the *Rasamanjari* and hence the differences in the facial formula and the treatment of landscape.”<sup>7</sup> In group “B” we find a number of changes in the style. The human figures, squat as they are, are bound to the earth and lose their earlier vitality. In this group human faces are fleshy and heavily modelled. On the colophon page, for example, Krishna’s face is so heavily shaded that it gives the impression of a beard rising on his cheeks. The eyes seem curvacious; human figures are shorter and their general appearance is more sophisticated than in group “A”.

In general group “A” is more decorative than “B” which is more naturalistic. Some early tendencies like “curtain clouds”, very popular in nayika paintings and painted in a few miniatures in group “A”, do not show up in group “B”. The compo-

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5. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Vol. V Rajput Painting, Boston, 1962, p. 170*

6. Douglas Barrett and Basil Gray, *Painting of India, n. p., 1963, p. 163..*

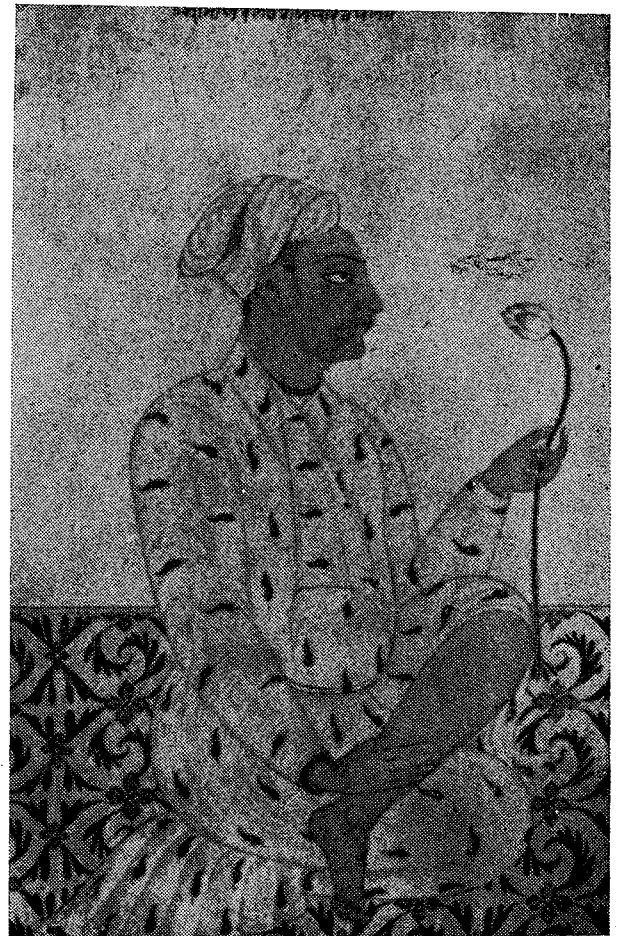
7. M S. Randhawa and S. D. Bhambri “*Basohli Paintings of Bhanudatta Rasamanjari*” Roopa-Lekha, *Vol. XXXVI, nos. I & 2, p. 5*



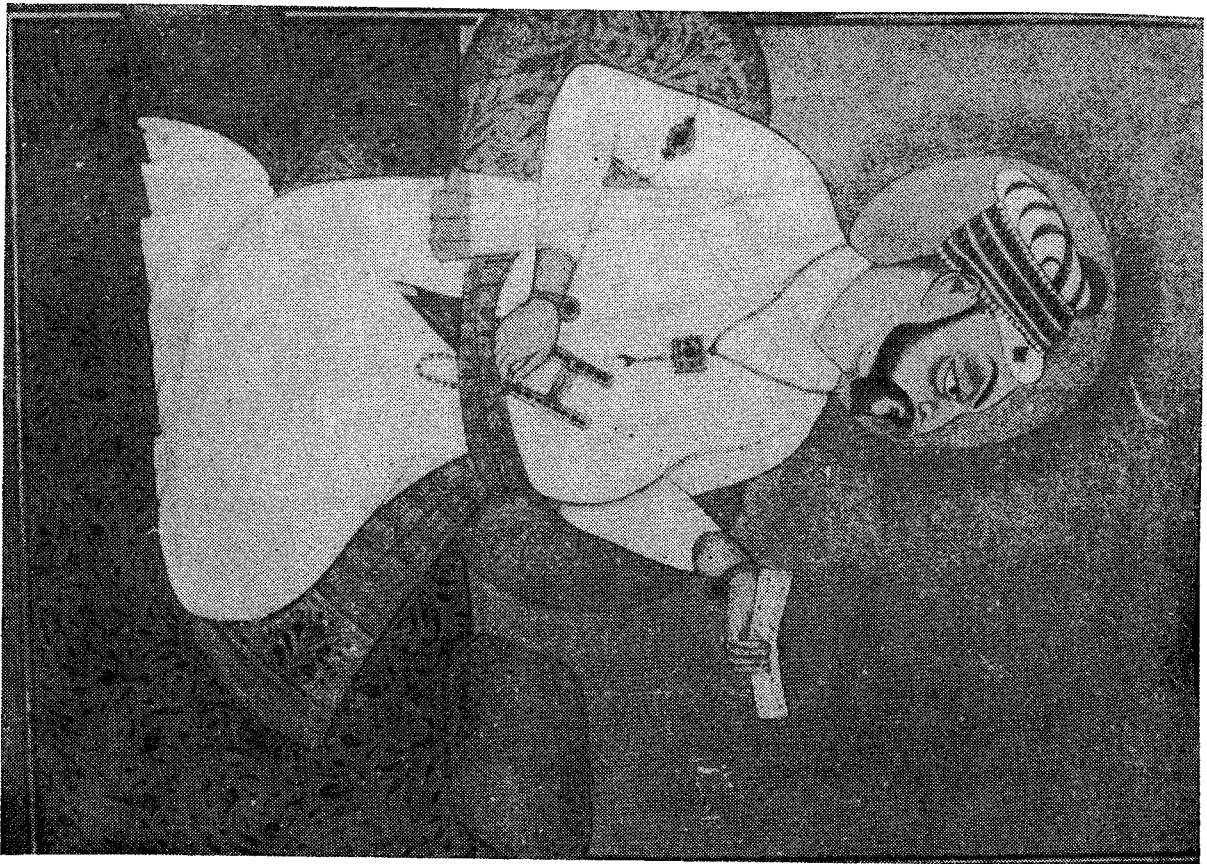
5. Probably Raja Kirpal Pal of Basohli (1678-93), late 17th cent.  
[Coll. : Sir Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.]



6. Raja Sangram Pal of Basholi (1635-73).  
Late 17th cent. [BKB]



7. Prince Dhiraj Pal of Basholi  
(1693-1725). Late 17th Cent. [BKB]



8. Prince Mojidin, early 18th cent. [Coll. : BKB]



9. Raja Sarangdhar, early 18th cent. [Coll. : BKB]



sitions in group "A" paintings show a more developed artistic sense and the colour scheme is more brilliant and warm with a constant emphasis on purity of colour tones. The style is more ornate and human figures are imbued with more dignified movements, portrayed with gesticulations which are more convincing. The scenes are closely knit and impressive.

In both groups "A" and "B" the scenes are mainly restricted to bed chambers which are the scenes of lovers' meetings, except for the ones in which the text dictates that the lovers appear within a landscape. There is an intermediary stage when half of the scenes are occupied by natural surroundings or architecture. In other instances heavy and attractive foliage frames the scenes. In each case artists distort architecture or foliage and create new traditions. It is human form, however, which dominates the scenes. Artists portray more and more subtle feelings; eroticism is generally avoided.

On a stylistic basis, group "A" paintings should be of about 1680, at least a decade earlier than the 1694 series. This change of attitude as reflected in the paintings required a decade or two: proof of the changing mood of patrons and artists. We can refer to the Akbar school of painting in this connection; the same set of artists working in the "*Razmnama and Rasmayana*" group seem to be less creative and more conventional in their later paintings, as in paintings of the Lahore group. In the case of the *Rasamanjari* illustrations, if the same artists continued from group "A" to group "B", their creative period had more or less passed when group "B" was being illustrated. There could have been, of course, a shift in the generation of the painters.

The *Rasamanjari* paintings depict idyllic surroundings: the nayakas and nayikas move in princely environments. The decorative art manifests itself in details of heavy jewelry and dress as well as imposing architecture. The scenes are divided into colour patterns, each overlapping the other and forming pleasant contrasts so that even dress, upholstery, architectural backgrounds and landscapes are reduced to colour patterns. The youthful and lively figures of the girls shown make a special impact on our senses. They are neatly arranged and prominently set out in the scenes in spite of their heavy jewelry and rich dress or the architectural details which fail to subdue the main feeling. Even the rain drops create a suitable background, stopping at human figures. An example is the case of the *Abhisarika Nayika* in which the girl appears in the characteristic attitude, gently lifting her skirt to reveal her slender form.

It is impossible that such a mature and lively style as that found in the *Rasamanjari* illustrations could be restricted to only one series. It is, therefore, quite likely that a number of other sets of paintings were produced in the style of the 17th century. Unfortunately most of these are unknown to us but we might discuss here a few portraits

At least five portraits of Raja Kirpal Pal of Basohli are known in different collections: one in the Punjab Museum, Chandigarh; one in the personal collection of Karl Khandalavala, Bombay; one in the personal collection of J. LeRoy Davidson, Los Angeles, California; one formerly in the S. Cary Welch collection, Cambridge, Mass., and now in the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; and one in the Sir Chester Beatty Library collection, Dublin, Ireland (fig. 5). The latter is not inscribed but it resembles the features of this raja known from other inscribed portraits.<sup>8</sup> Another portrait from the Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu, belongs to this group. The painting shows a noble man, probably Raja Kirpal, leaning on a pillow against a bright yellow background. The painting displays characteristics related to early decorative Basohli style: bright colours, narrow striped sky and bold designed carpet on which the prince sits. Probably this raja was fond of commissioning his portraits. Unlike the portraits of Govardhan Chand of Guler and Balwant Singh, all of these show the raja in sitting positions which may suggest the traditional nature of the school at this stage. We can detect among them a difference in his age.

These portraits are useful in two respects. They demonstrate that Basohli artists who were trained to paint in the decorative style were equally clever in the art of portraiture, and that the subject of painting was not restricted to romantic serials. Painters produced portraits not only of Raja Kirpal Pal, but also of Sangram Pal (fig. 6) and several other unidentified personages. One portrait of Khiraj Pal (1693-1725) is in the Punjab Museum, Chandigarh, and another depicting Dhiraj Pal as a Prince is in the Bharat Kala Bhavan collection. The Kala Bhavan example is inscribed, "Sri Mian Bilauria Dhirajpal" (fig. 7).

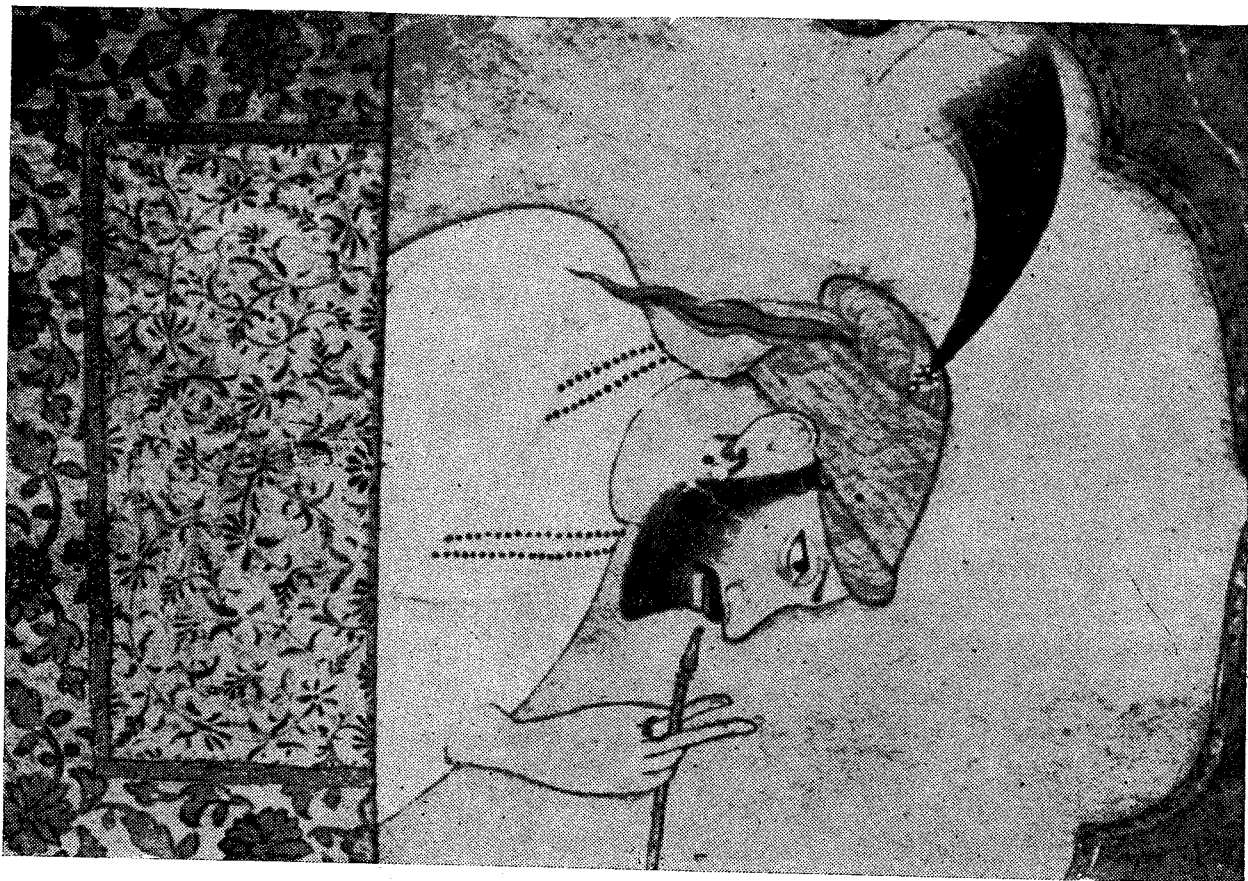
There are a number of portraits in the Bharat Kala Bhavan collection, Banaras, which correspond with late 17th and early 18th century style of portraiture in Basohli. Stylistically they belong to Kirpal Pal's group. Some are inscribed "portrait of Mojdin" (Muizuddin) (fig. 8), which was another name for the Mughal prince Jahandar Shah who became emperor later.<sup>9</sup> One of them says "portrait of Sri Raja Sarangdhar" (fig. 9), another "Sri Mian Chatrasal Bandral" (fig. 10), and some are uninscribed (fig. 11).

Two nayika paintings in the Bharat Kala Bhavan collection (fig. 12) could be attributed here to Basohli in this period just after the 1694 *Rasamanjari* group. At this stage the painting style achieves a high degree of complexity, and tends to be more playful, elegant, and refined. Colours are rather sombre in comparison to the *Rasamanjari* paintings.

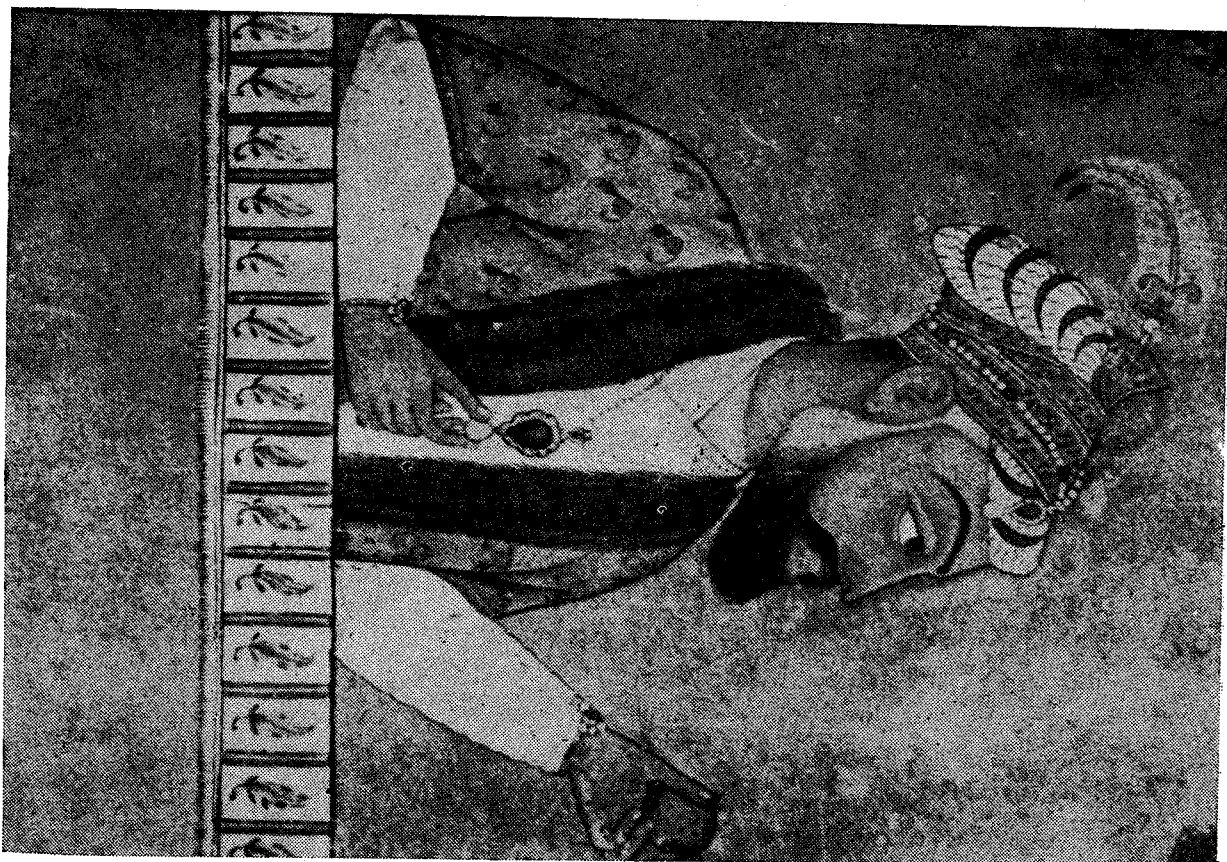
8. Karl Khandalawala, *Pahari Miniature Painting, Bombay, 1958, fig. 58*

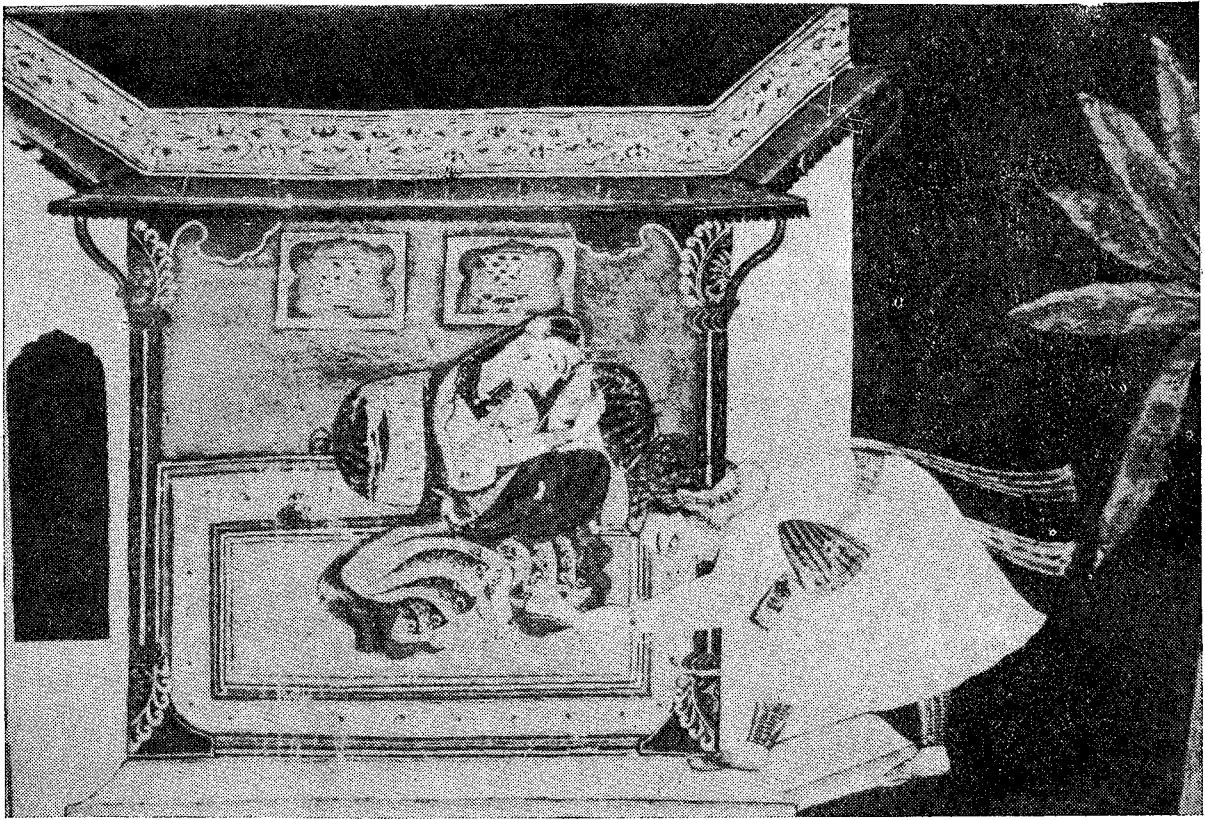
9. *Jahandar Shah, son of the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah, came on the throne in 1712. See Welseley Haig, The Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV, Cambridge, 1937 pp. 325-26.*

10. Prince Chhatrasal Bandral, early 18th cent. [Coll.: BKB]



11. A portrait, early 18th cent. [Coll.: BKB]





12. Nayika, late 18th cent. [Coll.: BKB]



13. Mrituniava Shiva, early 18th cent. [Coll.: BKB]

A few miniatures should be discussed here which do not belong to any particular series but stylistically can be attributed to the post-Kirpal Pal period. Their bright colour schemes and freedom of expression show the superb technique of Basohli artists. We can take as examples: "Krishna Fluting" in the National Museum, New Delhi; "Krishna and Gopa", "Girl with Hawk", and "Girl playing with Yo-Yo" in the Bharat Kala Bhavan Collection, Banaras. These paintings seem to be earlier than the Ragamala series (discussed below) since they still follow some of the characteristics of the *Rasamanjari* illustrations. The transparent costume of "Girl with Hawk", for example, is a survival of the *Rasamanjari* tradition. The eye type of the gopis in "Krishna Fluting" relates to the tradition of seventeenth century paintings.

"Siva and Parvati" <sup>10</sup> may belong to this period. Another painting, "Mritunjaya Siva" (fig. 13) in the same collection shows the excellent colour sense of the Basohli artists. They are successful in bringing a forceful effect with a few colours against a plain rich red background. The main figure of Siva which forms a bold white patch makes a pleasing colour contrast. The god appears more as a symbol than as a human figure, conveying the feeling of the divine in a bold way. These paintings also suggest that Siva was a popular subject among Basohli artists.

"Krishna and Maidens" <sup>11</sup> is an attractive example of this period. The facial features of the gopis bear similarities to the facial features of Raginis in the Bharat Kala Bhavan.

During this period the sponsorship of painting was not limited to the aristocratic class of society but was more widespread. A *Ragamala* series in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, throws light on folk traditions. Its palette glows with strong colours; the landscape is treated elaborately and flame-shaped leaves spring from the foliage. In some cases flower-like forms that appear above branches and trees are commonly seen in spray form in this series.

A number of Krishna Lila and Nayika paintings in a similar style can be seen in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. In these paintings the sky is shown with blue and white stripes although in some cases white clouds float over blue skies. On the whole, these miniatures present a "folkish" version in comparison to the classical tradition of Basohli style.

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10. Karl Khandalawala, *Pahari Miniature Painting*, fig. 31

11. J. C. French, *Himalayan Art*, London, 1930, fig. 1.

A *nayika* painting in the Freer Gallery, Washington, D. C., suggests that the Basohli style evolved into several branches at this point, the prime of its life. It is difficult to ascertain the exact provenance of this painting, but a Basohli substyle is suggested by the treatment of trees (fig. 14): the foliage is bent at the top and clusters to form bunches of leaves. An attempt is made to depict a hill and stream in a naturalistic way. Decorative lotus blossoms are strewn in the water while a sap green background suggests green hills where the *nayika* is sitting on a "chauki". A pair of swans in the stream reminds her of her absent lover. The picture has a characteristic Basohli red border, the sky at the top of the picture also follows the same tradition. Another example in a similar style is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.<sup>12</sup>

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12. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Boston Museum Catalogue*, fig. 1.

## RAGAMALA PAINTINGS

Thus, it is clear that the style was already progressing in certain directions. The next stage of Basohli paintings is implied by certain undated examples which point to the evolution of the Basohli style in many aspects. We cannot generalize about these characteristics because they are based mainly on a *Ragamala* series (or to be precise two or three *Ragamala* sets very similar in style), yet we find a general change in outlook. These *Ragamala* paintings (figs. 15-18) are scattered in different collections: the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Baharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the private collection of Karl Khandalavala, Bombay.

In these paintings we find that preponderant architectural details have been eliminated and open-air scenes are preferred, initiated by the demands of a square and elongated format. In some cases canopies are introduced in landscape settings. Plain monochrome backgrounds are also featured. A tendency towards simplification of the style in which artists gradually shed the over-ornamentation of the *Rasamanjari* group has taken place. The result is that human figures have become more prominent and lively: the *raginis* are more elegant, their form slender and tall. There is an overall sophistication in feeling, and more pleasing colour tones are used. Trees take naturalistic forms although their decorative precedents are still identifiable. Drapery is less transparent and heavy shading generally avoided. The sky is occasionally shown with vaulted stripes in blue and white. The idealized *amour* of the *ragas* and the *raginis* is visible in their graceful postures.

Two examples of this period will be discussed in detail here. Both are representative from Bharat Kala Bhavan collection, Banaras.

Fig. 15 is inscribed at the top, "Raga Vardhan Dipake ka putra"—Raga Vardhan son of Dipak. The Takri characters on this picture and on "Ragini Gandhari", another example from the same or a similar series, resemble the inscriptions of the Raja Kirpal Pal period. In the Raga Vardhan the whole picture area is divided into two colour compartments: green and yellow, separated by architectural details.

Fig. 16 illustrates a Ragini Gandhari, inscribed as "Ragini Gandhari Sri Raga Ki Bharya"—Ragini Gandhari, wife of Sri Raga. The Nayika is shown here sitting on a carpet which is again a characteristic carpet, which can be compared with the rugs found in the portraits of Basohli (already seen). A donkey is standing in front of the *nayika*. This animal is not related to the Ragini Gandhari, and probably the artist did not have a correct idea of the Ragini. A maid is standing behind the main figure with fly whisk, indicating the royal status of the *nayika*.

These miniatures show a close affinity to the *Rasamanjari* group in the application of facial colours, but the expressions are subdued in this series. A general sophistication is seen in the illustrations: movements are shown but portrayed in a more dignified manner. The colour scheme is more pleasant and rich backgrounds are almost eliminated. The *raginis* wear characteristic ornaments studded with emeralds (beetle wings) and pearls (white dots) but their dress is less translucent.

A peculiar tradition in Basohli painting is to suggest symbolically a dense forest by the introduction of a few trees. The purpose seems to be that of suggesting a sylvan atmosphere. The beautifully formed trees make a suitable background rather than overshadowing the main scene. This principle seems to be followed in the "Ragini Gujari" in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the "Ragini Ramkali" in the Metropolitan Museum of Art collection, New York. In both cases, two trees appear at the sides while the main portion of each painting is taken by the figure of the ragini. The treatment of trees shows some change in form, with leaves less richly painted and less detailed.

Following these *Ragamala* paintings in time appears an interesting miniature in the Bharat Kala Bhavan collection (fig. 19). (Another version of this painting is in the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi.) In the painting, Radha and Krishna are shown sitting on the bank of the Yamuna, dressed in lotus petals; Radha offers a lotus bud to Krishna who faces her. The artist has created a rich portrayal of lotuses with their alternating white and pink colours. The tryst of Radha and Krishna is illustrated in a perfect expression: the lovers are completely self-absorbed. It is an example of the narrative power of Basohli painters as well as their evocative skills. The colour scheme of blue, gray and pink is extremely attractive.

A number of paintings based on tantric subjects also show great achievements of Basohli artists. This group usually shows bright colour schemes, the gods and goddesses are depicted with bold expression, though their facial types remain unchanged. A picture in the Bharat Kala Bhavan collection is an appropriate example from this group. The illustration (fig. 20) shows a tantric deity (probably Kali) sitting on Siva who is lying on a human corpse on a funeral pyre. Brahma, Visnu, and Siva are shown paying respect to the deity with folded hands. Stylistically it is an early Basohli example of about 1700 on the basis of its strong colours and bold drawing. Beetle wings used in this case can be compared with *Rasamanjari* illustrations.

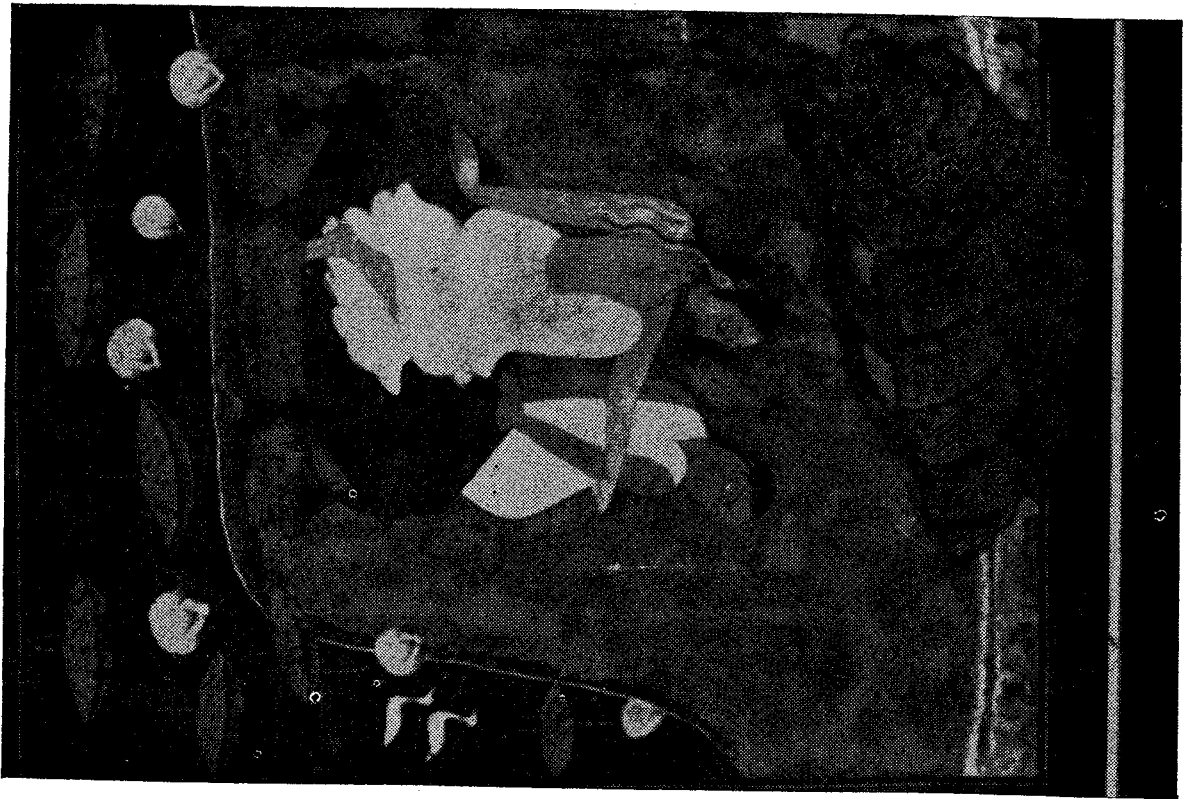
Another example of interest is in the collection of Sri Pratap Singh Museum, Srinagar<sup>13</sup>. This is a tantric form of Durga in which she sits on a lion throne and is attended by two other goddesses carrying Siva's emblems: "Damaru", "Trisula",

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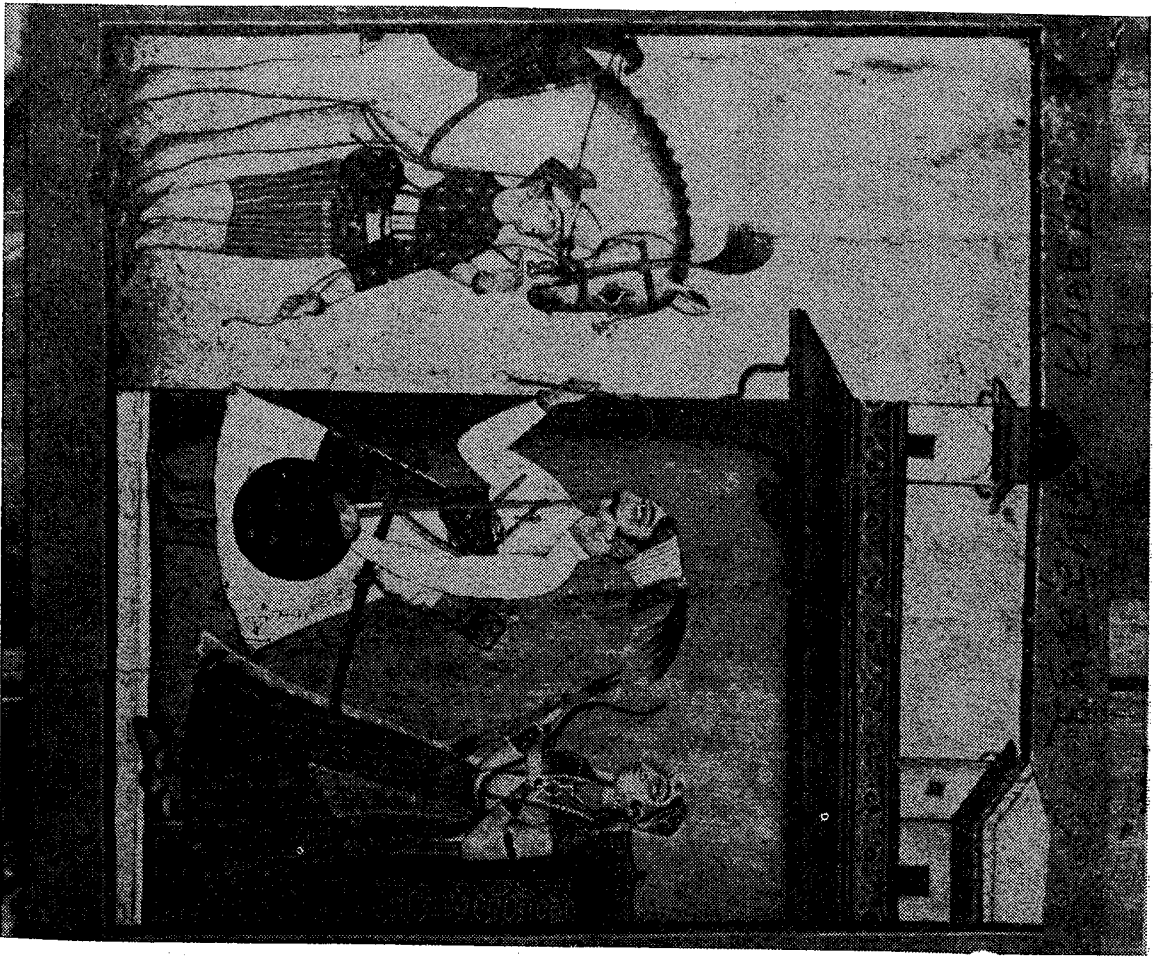
13. *The following description is based on a slide in the American Institute of Indian Studies, Ramnagar, Banaras*

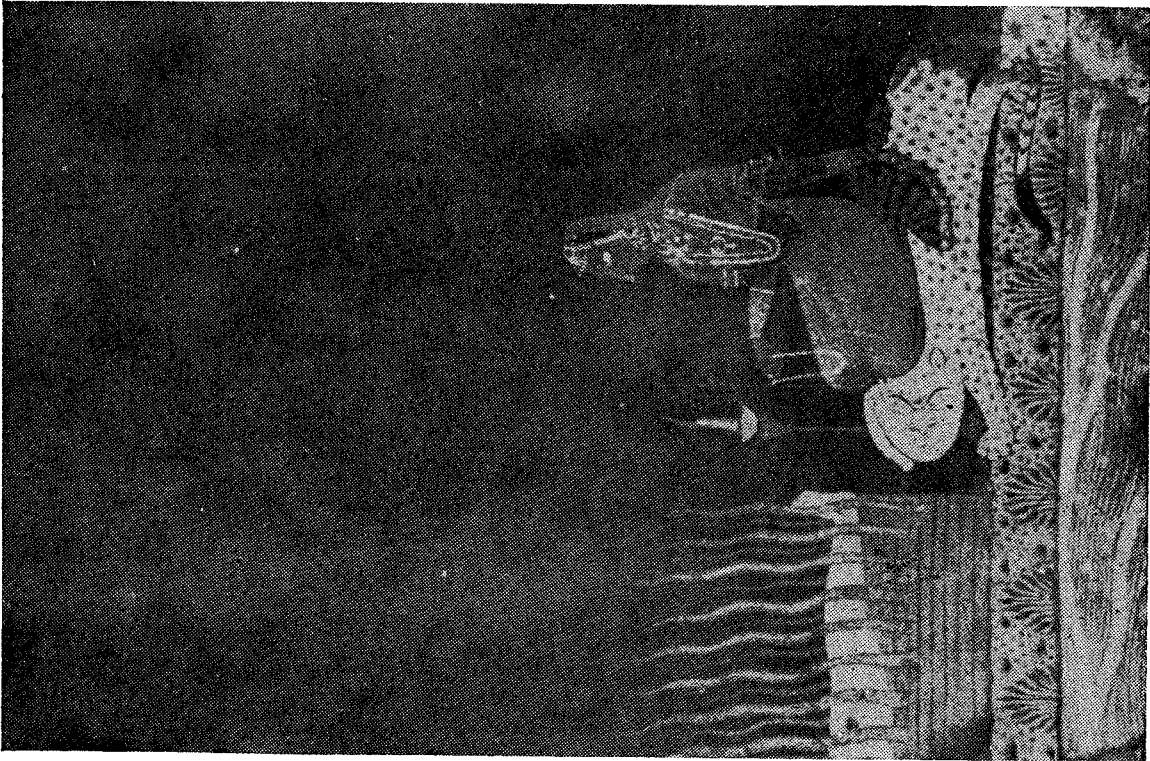


14. *Nayikas*, 1st decade of 18th cent. [Coll.: Freer Art Gallery, Wash. D.C.]

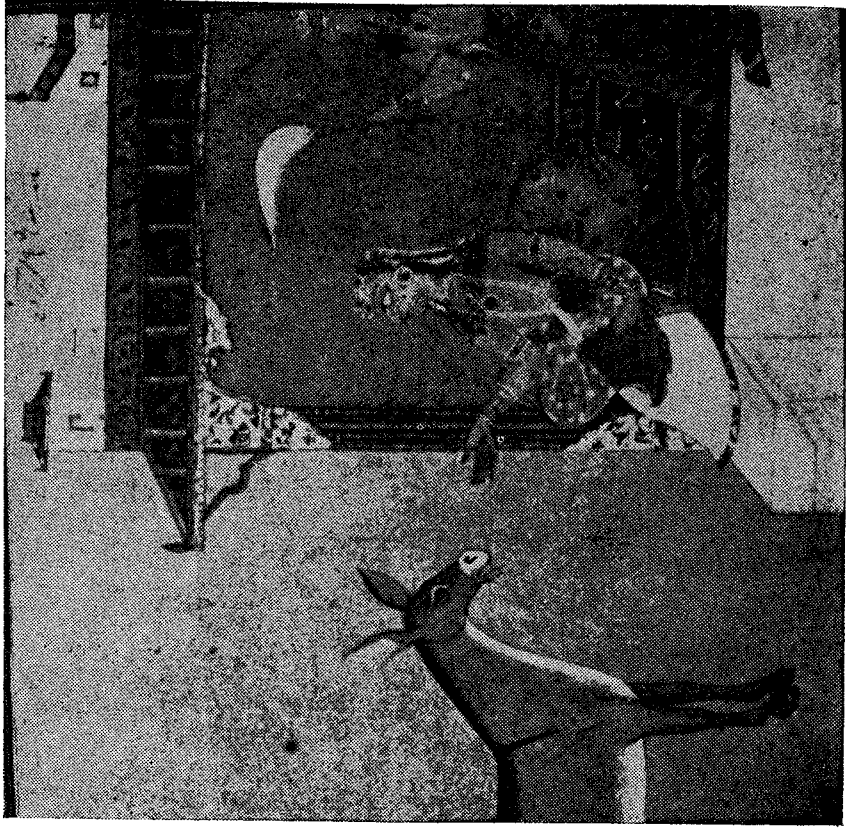


15. *Raga Vardnan*, 1st. qtr. 18th cent. [Coll.: BKB]





17. Ragini Kamodini, 1st. qtr, 18th cent. [Coll.:BKB]



16. Ragini Gandhari, 1st qtr. 18th cent.[Coll.: BKB]

“Khada”, a lotus flower, a bow and arrow, etc. The painting displays the workmanship of Basohli artists in its bright colours and decorative rendering of flowers in the foreground.

Like many other centres in the hills, Basohli has been a stronghold of tantricism. A shait shika representing Devi Chamunda was established in the 16th century<sup>14</sup> and is still popularly worshipped. The same feeling has been expressed by these painters of which many illustrations have come to light, yet these paintings generally show widely popular forms of tantric deities as contrasted with the specialized and peculiar forms from Kulu Mandi.

The Basohli style reached its full maturity in 1730, as represented by a *Gita Govinda* series painted by Manau of that date. But before we discuss that extensive series, we should mention a few miniatures and their pictorial qualities which are stylistically prior to the *Gita Govinda* set.

A representation of a hawk (fig. 21) in the Bharat Kala Bhavan collection is an instance of a new subject favoured by the Basohli painters. The white bird with yellow outlines is set against a plain red background. Birds and animals are rarely treated as a subject of painting in the early Basohli and Guler-Kangra styles.

Another example is in the Central Museum, Lahore.<sup>15</sup> This painting of Radha and Krishna sitting on the bank of the Yamuna is published in black and white so that it is impossible to tell its colour scheme. Its round trees are different from the conical trees of the *Gita Govinda*.

The river Yamuna gives an appropriate setting for Radha and Krishna in the forest of Brindavana.

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14. Ajit Mookerjee, *Tantra Art, Basle*, 1966-67, no. 45.

15. L. Ashton, *Art of India and Pakistan, London*, 1950 pl. 101, no. 521.

## GITA GOVINDA

*Gita Govinda* paintings are one of the greatest achievements of the Basohli school. The illustrations successfully expressed the poetic feelings of the author, Jayadeva, the spirit of Vaisnavism and devotion to Lord Krishna.

A *Gita Govinda* set dated 1730 was first discovered by the late N. C. Mehta. This *Gita Govinda* series was painted in a much more sophisticated manner, differing in colour scheme and drawing from the earlier group and showing a mature stage of the Basohli style. The *Gita Govinda* text itself offers a more picturesque background for the love play of Radha and Krishna, its scenes moving in the forest of Brindabana and on the banks of the river Yamuna. Artists took full advantage of this setting. This 1730 *Gita Govinda* was not a royal copy, but was commissioned for a noble lady, Malini, and was done by the painter Manaku<sup>16</sup> as stated in the inscription. The inscribed leaf is in the Lahore Museum, Pakistan. It is interesting to note that the same verse was copied on a later set of *Gita Govinda* miniatures painted in Guler-Kangra style. In the Basohli version the inscription is in gold letters. The Guler-Kangra one is inscribed in black ink. It is characteristic of Indian paintings to illustrate the same text again and again, often creating confusion for art historians. However, the palettes of these two sets are different and compositions slightly changed. A type of architecture with niches in line becomes a characteristic in the later style and is present here. The change in costume type is also notable. The *peshwaj*, a tight fitting pyjama, is disappearing slowly and the *ghaghra*, a heavy long skirt, is taking its place.

A number of miniatures were painted in a style similar to the *Gita Govinda* paintings, yet we find a change in the expression. A suitable example is a *Bhagavata* set in the collection of Raja Dhruv Chand of Lambagraon, Kangra Valley.<sup>17</sup> It is a pleasant set in its colouring but at the same time shows signs of decadence in style - heavy faces, squat human figures and long narrow eyes indicate that the artist was following a tradition devoid of fresh ideas. Colours were still bright, with mixed colours like mauve and orange preferred. The Basohli style's mainstream was drying up but some characteristics of this style were followed by the Guler-Kangra style later on. The Ramayana drawings mentioned at the beginning of this article were done in the late Guler-Kangra style. The loosening of the style progressed as the decades rolled on, and after 1730 the great period of Basohli style was over and no important painting were done.

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<sup>16</sup> M. S. Randhawa, *Kangra Painting on Gita Govinda*, New Delhi, 1963, pp. 17-55, (See Introduction by W. G. Archer.)

<sup>17</sup> M.S. Randhawa, *Basohli Painting*, pl. 11.



18. Raga Khumba, 1st. qtr. 18th century. [Coll. : BKB]



19. Krishna and Radha, early 18th cent. [Coll. : BKB]

Another factor which must have worked against the decorative traditional style of painting like Basohli was the advent of the naturalistic treatment of Manak-Nainsukh style, a decided influence of the later Mughal style. The change of taste dealt a death-blow to decorative art.

## BASOHLI STYLE IN OTHER CENTERS

The Basohli style was not limited to the political region of Basohli but was also favoured by other rulers. At one stage the Basohli school of painting converged on other subschools, judging from a number of portraits in the Basohli idiom which show likenesses of princes from other states; for example, the portraits of Raja Dhruv Dev and Suih Dev of Jasrota and a number of portraits from the Mankot collection. Regional variations are available but it is difficult to pinpoint them in terms of regional attribution. Thus the Basohli style was modified to a certain extent as it was handled by different artists for their patrons. Mankot will be discussed here as the main offshoot of Basohli style.

The style at Mankot (the modern Ramkot) was the closest to the Basohli type. There is a distinct facial type in Kulu paintings and a different palette was used for Mandi portraits, but Mankot paintings are difficult to distinguish from Basohli examples. Both in colourscheme and drawing, Mankot and Basohli are so alike that if they do not have inscriptions giving the king's or prince's name (most often they are so inscribed) it is impossible to distinguish them from Basohli portraits. It was difficult to think about a style of painting in Mankot state a few decades ago. For the first time a portrait of the blind Raja Sital Dev was published in *The Art of India and Pakistan*.<sup>18</sup> Since then a lot of new material has come to light. The Punjab Museum, Chandigarh, has acquired 250 paintings from Kunwar Indravijaya Singh of the Mankot royal family. M. S. Randhawa published some of the examples from this extensive collection.<sup>19</sup> These miniatures cover a wide range of religious texts: the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavata Purana*, and the *Dasavatara*. Love stories like *Sassi Punnu*, *Laila Majnu*, *Bazbahadur*, and *Rupamati* were also favoured for illustration. Besides these subjects there are a number of portraits of local royal personages and nobles. Stylistically these paintings are very close to the *Rasamanjari* paintings from Basohli. The portrait of Raja Kirpal Pal (of Basohli), an important document of the Basohli style, came from this collection. The similarities between the female facial type of the *Rasamanjari* paintings and the maids appearing in the portrait of Raja Kirpal Pal obtained from the Mankot collection show a close relationship in form.

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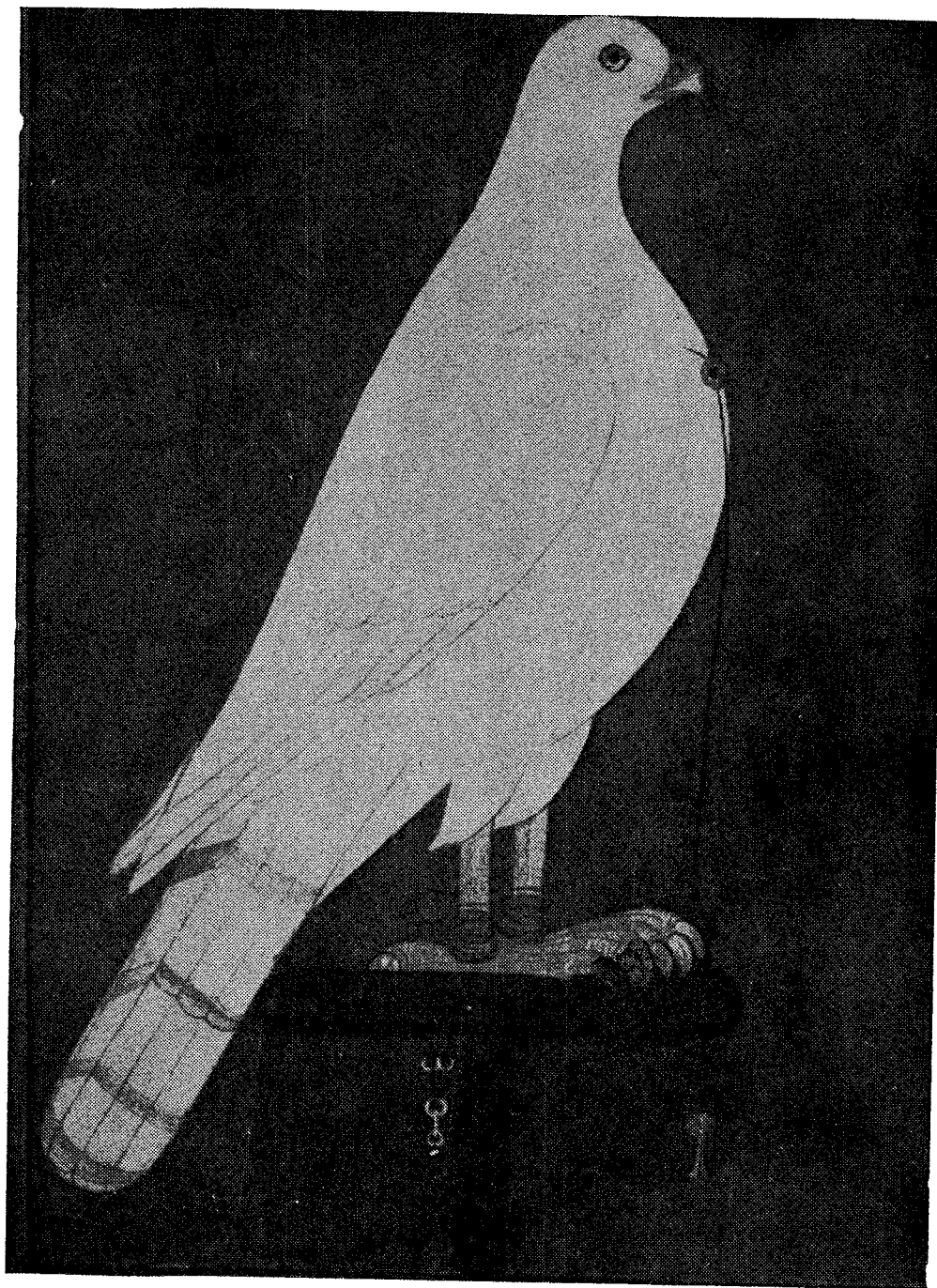
18. L. Ashton, *The Art of India and Pakistan*, no. 515, Pl. 106

19. M. S. Randhawa "Paintings from Mankot", *Lalit Kala*, no. 6, October, 1959, pp. 72-75





20. A Tantric deity, ca. 1700. [Coll.: BKB]



21. Baz Sarkhab (the hawk): a rare portrait of a  
bird in Basholi style. [Coll.: BKB]

The explanation of this extension of the Basohli style to Mankot is the marriage of Kirpal Pal of Basohli to a Mankot princess. It is worthy of notice that all the paintings discovered in the Mankot collection belong to the Kirpal Pal period or a subsequent stage and are not related to the earlier groups. If the style had existed before this stage, examples of earlier influence would have been available. It is also important to note that even the portraits of Mankot princes three or four generations prior to the Kirpal Pal Period do not show earlier Basohli traits and were probably done around 1690. Most probably it was the matrimonial relationship which introduced Basohli paintings to Mankot.

Describing the similarities between the painting styles in these two states, M. S. Randhawa observed, "The portraits of Kirpal Pal in this Collection are significant because the typical female Basohli face which we see in the Rasamanjari paintings of the group "A" is also seen. The Raja is shown attended by two maid servants, one carrying a large sword and waving a *chauri*, and another sitting in front of him looking after the *huqqa*. They have typical Basohli faces of group "A". 20

Besides the portraits of Mankot chiefs and their courtiers there are portraits of other hill chiefs in this collection; for example, we find a portrait of Raja Ghansar Dev who ruled Jammu for ten years during the absence of his brother Ranjit Dev (1753-1781), and the portrait of Hindal Pal (1367-1678), the younger brother and successor of Raja Sangram Pal (1635-1673), the ruler of Basohli.

In other centres the Basohli style seems to have inspired the local styles and definitely left a stamp on them. Yet in minor details the examples show the continuity of the Mughal style under Basohli influence. It is only in the expression and to some extent in colour scheme that the Basohli treatment is found. This we experience both in the local portraits and textual paintings. For example, the portraits from Nurpur, Jasrota, Chamba, and Guler show the same bright colour scheme.

We find from the above group of paintings that Basohli influence reached these local centres in the late 17th century during a time which coincides with the period of Raja Kirpal Pal of Basohli and may be due to the revival of Basohli painting during his reign. His personal relationship with other princes and a general awakening of aesthetic reaction in the hills also furthered this movement, a development almost parallel to that of the Guler-Kangra school of the late 18th and early 19th century.

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20. M. S. Randhawa, "Paintings from Mankot", *Lalit Kala* no. 6, October, 1959, pp. 72-75