

Chapter 2

Methodology

2.1 Documentation of Paintings

The primary source of data for the research are paintings dispersed in museums and private collections across the world. As a large number of museums in North America and Europe have made their collections public, the images are available on their respective websites. These museums include – British Museum, British Library, Victoria and Albert Museum (United Kingdom); Cleveland Museum of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, San Diego Museum of Art, National Museum of Asian Art, Chazen Museum of Art (United States); Rijksmuseum (Netherlands) and Rietberg Museum (Switzerland). The online repository of art of the various museums in India helped me to see the collections of Indian museums, including – National Museum, New Delhi; Allahabad Museum; Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad; and Indian Museum, Kolkata. The museum collections that I viewed personally include – Cleveland Museum of Art, United States; Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh; Himachal State Museum, Shimla; Dogra Art Museum, Jammu; and Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. I requested images from prestigious museums and collections in India and abroad, including – Asian Civilisations Museum (Singapore); NC Mehta Gallery, Ahmedabad; Jagdish and Kamala Mittal Museum of Indian Art, Hyderabad; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (United States). I had the opportunity of receiving images from the vast archives of Vijay Sharma (Chamba); and Catherine Glynn Benkaim (United States). I studied the private collections of Ludwig Habighorst (Koblenz, Germany); Konrad Seitz (Bonn, Germany); Ralph and Catherine Glynn Benkaim (Beverly Hills, United States); Gursharan Sidhu (Seattle, United States); Vikram Dogra (Rochester, United States) and Vijay Sharma (Chamba, Himachal Pradesh). Catalogues of auction houses and art dealers such as Bonhams, Sotheby's, Christie's, Pundole's, Francesca Galloway, Rob Dean Art, Simon Ray, Prahlad Babbar, Kapoor Galleries. Other than these, I purchased the licence of a few images on iStock.

2.2 Documentation of Sites

I undertook documentation of several sites relevant to my research, including – Royal Palace, Chamba; Laxmi Narayan Temple, Chamba; Raghunath Temple, Chamba; Narsimha Temple, Chamba; Sita-Ram Temple, Chamba; Shakti Temple, Mehla, Chamba; Devi-Kothi Temple, Churah, Chamba; Shakti Dehra Temple, Ganddehra, Chamba; Shakti Dehra Temple, Chattarari, Chamba; Chaurasi Temple, Bharmour, Chamba; Chamunda Temple, Chamba; Vamsigopala Temple, Chamba; Udai Singh Temple, Udaipur, Chamba; Basohli Fort, Basohli, Jammu and Kashmir; Nurpur Fort, Nurpur, Himachal Pradesh.

2.3 Analysis of Socio-Political and Cultural Factors

2.3.1 Ethnographic Survey

An ethnographic survey of notable priestly families in Chamba was conducted to understand the social and religious undertones in Chamba painting. A survey of local customs, rituals, religious rites, and social gatherings aided me in comprehending how miniature painting is associated with these practises. Given that the majority of paintings created in Chamba were religious in nature, notably Vaishnavite, a survey was conducted of a select group of Chamba Brahmins chosen for their proximity to the royal family, exploring the origins of their family; identification of the deity they hold in reverence; details about the temple(s) they serve as priests and information regarding their establishment; names of their ancestors who were entrusted with the temples' priesthood; and whether they possessed any painting.

Apart from the priestly class, I interviewed descendants of the Gujarati-Manikanth family, a family of painters who have been residing in Chamba since the mid-17th century. Ami Chand Dhiman, Hansraj Dhiman (d. 2019), and Prakash Dhiman are all schooled in the family heritage and own drawings dating back to the 17th century. The interview inquired information related to their art education in the family, number of painters in their previous generation, occupation of their father, their current occupation beyond painting, paintings in their possession, sources of visual inspiration during the early years of their art education, similarities or differences in style

compared to their brothers, relationship with other Chamba artisans such as woodcarvers, sculptors and tinkers, involvement in painting for temples, awareness of rituals associated with their family or Chamba painters in general.

2.3.2 Contextualisation of Painting in Chamba and Conceptualisation of Chamba School

As Pahari painting developed and prospered under the patronage of a number of Pahari chieftains in the early 17th century, it became imperative to analyse the political and historical factors which shaped this art form in order to study the nature of patronage, movement of painters and painted sets from one principality to another. Many of these shifts were precipitated by political and historical considerations such as diplomatic alliances, matrimonial ties, historical rivalries, economic prowess, and political influence. To study these factors, the two volumes of 'History of the Panjab Hill States', written methodically by Hutchison and Vogel in 1933 became the primary source of information. Apart from this, the Chamba royal genealogical records, copper-plate charters, and Takri documents in the Bhuri Singh Museum collection in Chamba were considered. In certain cases, the paintings became the basis for multiple historical references.

To gain a thorough understanding of the visual aspects in Pahari painting, I spent a year (2018—2019) studying the method of miniature painting under the supervision of Vijay Sharma, a well-known Chamba miniaturist. During this time span, I became acquainted with painting method, various types of papers, paints, and binders. My training as a miniaturist enabled me to examine the many techniques used in delineation, stippling, strokes, and shading. The instruction was also beneficial in terms of gaining an understanding of the techniques used by painters from various painting centres. Learning the art of painting helped me to prepare sketches and drawings of face-types and study of architecture in the thesis.

2.4 Iconographic Study

The foundation of this research is based on the methodological approach of the necessity of studying paintings in the regional cultural context of Chamba. As it has

been observed in the study, the painters active at Chamba, though bringing along motifs and visual elements from their diverse backgrounds, are also adopting elements of the local material culture into their vocabulary, especially in standardising their iconographies. Motifs which have been traditionally employed in the historic sculpture and woodcarving tradition of the region (7th century – 18th century CE) were observed in the study of the paintings.

Historically, stylistic analysis has served as the primary method of studying Pahari miniature paintings. However, it was observed in the elementary stage of examination that paintings which appear to be produced by artists exhibiting diverse stylistic approaches share the same iconographic and compositional elements, as recorded in sculptures and woodcarvings of Chamba dating back to the 7th century. Iconography, as a result, has surfaced as the invisible string which binds together paintings made in varying styles. Hence, at the fundamental level, the study is based on the comparison of paintings with regional material culture to identify the depiction of regional motifs in pictorial format.

2.5 Stylistic Analysis

Once the iconographic details are studied, the secondary methodology employed in the framework of the research is the stylistic analysis. Stylistic analysis serves a twofold purpose: it reveals the individualistic characteristics of a painter; and also aids in the development of an understanding of a school's dominant visual language. As a result, the methodological framework relies comprehensively on the stylistic examination of paintings. The examination focuses on the depiction of human figures, including face types, physiognomies, the representation of the eyes, nose, chin, ears, hands, and feet, as well as jewellery, clothing, headdress, and hairstyles. At the secondary level, an examination of – line types; colour composition; and pigment selection – is considered. Similarly, a visual study of compositional aspects such as architecture, flora and fauna, decorative motifs, handling of the backdrop, and depiction of the ground and sky is done. The stylistic analysis gestured towards the presence of more than one painting schools at Chamba during the mid-17th to mid-18th century. Hence, the several portraits of the Rajas of Chamba are considered as evidence suggesting royal patronage that was continuously provided to these schools

over the generations. A chronological trajectory of the various schools from their origin to their development as well as their successive decline has also been drawn.

2.6 Palaeographic Study

As it was observed during the research, while paintings belonging to the North-Western Himalayas are generally inscribed in Takri, a number of Takri systems exist which differ from region to region. While the Takri written in Pahari foothills towards the west display affinity to Gurmukhi, due to geographic proximity to Punjab, isolated valleys such as Chamba, Mandi and Kulu have developed esoteric modes of writing. It was also occurred that with every change in the generation of painters, the Takri hand is also changing. Inscriptions written on paintings belonging to the 17th century are closer to Devashesha, an ancient form of Takri which is closer to Sharada, while the inscriptions recorded on paintings belonging to the 18th century follow a more standardised form of Takri. Interestingly, this change is also reflected in the copper-plate charters belonging to this period. On the other hand, it has also come to observation, that the Takri inscriptions on paintings belonging to the 17th century are inscribed in black ink, whereas the later paintings showcase the use of white ink in inscriptions. These palaeographic factors have cast a major influence on the research and hence have been taken into consideration.