

SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2023

Flawed GI Tag for BASOHLI School of PAINTING

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Jammu Province had hoped that the coveted Geographical Indication (GI) Tag for Basohli School of Painting will bring rightful recognition to the unique art, and help restore and renew the sheen of the historic place of Basohli. The factually distorted documentation, however, has soured the joy and dashed the hopes.

A Geographical Indication, as per the World Intellectual Property Organization, is a tag used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities, characteristics or a reputation that are essentially due to that place of origin. It conveys assurance of quality and distinctiveness, confers legal protection, and enables authorised users to prevent its use by a third party whose product does not conform to the standards set out in its code of practice. The tag is valid for a decade, after which it can be renewed.

By this definition, the features and traits of Basohli School of Painting must be rooted in Basohli, its endemic natural resources, traditions, artists and their ancient/ancestral skills and intellect.

Basohli Vishwasthali Art and Painting Handicrafts Industrial Cooperative Ltd. as the applicant, Directorate of Handicrafts & Handloom, Jammu and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) as the facilitators of the process, have submitted to the GI Registry that "The Basohli painting craft started by Moghuls"; Basohli Paintings is a fusion of Hindu mythology Mughal Miniature Techniques & Folk art of local hills evolved in the 17th & 18th Centuries"; and "Basohli was founded by Raja Bhupat Pal sometime in 1635." These erroneous claims and contradictory to the history have been published in the GI Journal.

As per local tradition, Basohli State is said to have been founded by 'Basu', a local Rana. He was defeated in 10th Century by Raja Man Shakiya of Vallapur (Balaur), who subsequently absorbed Basohli with Vallapur, writes Shiv Dobiya in 'Basohli Darshan'.

On the other hand, Ganesh Das Badhera's 'Rajdarshini' mentions that in 10th Century, Raja Avtar Dev of Jammu provided refuge to Raja Anand Pal of Takhashila, who had suffered defeat at the hands of Mahmud Ghaznavi, and also bestowed on him the jagir of Basohli. In 'Duggar ka Ithaas', Padma Shri Prof. Shiv Nirmohi opines that these facts in Rajdarshini might be correct as a matter of course. He's also remarked that Shakyavanshi Rajas of Vallapur are different from PalVanshi Rajas of Basohli and the latter might have possibly absorbed Vallapur and its dynasty in 13th-14th Century.

The historians including Nirmohi and Dobiya have written that Raja Bhupat Pal (born 1573) of Basohli was imprisoned by Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur with the help of Mughal Emperor Jahangir, where he languished for 14 years, until about 1627 AD. That year, he assembled his army and defeated Nurpur Garrison and recovered his state. The transfer of capital from Balaur to Basohli due to



security reasons, probably happened in 1630. He was assassinated in 1635, allegedly by Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur with the connivance of Mughals, when he had gone to Delhi to visit Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan.

It can be inferred from the available texts that Basohli state was not founded in 1635. Nor for that matter, was Basohli town.

Further, the first mention of Basohli School of Painting is in a report of Archaeological Survey of India 1918-19, stating that Archaeological Section of the Central Museum, Lahore has acquired a few Basohli Miniature Paintings (called 'Tibeti' by the curio dealers around Punjab) and their curator has concluded that the School is possibly of Pre-Mughal origin. Since these paintings were of Tantrik Devis such as Durga, and used fragments of beetles' wings for ornamentation, amongst other considerations, they are found to be the later works of the Basohli School.

Ajit Ghose, India's foremost art collector and critic, revealed he had begun collecting specimens of Basohli Miniature Paintings more than a decade before the report, some of which are clearly older than those in Lahore Museum, and represent a much older tradition. He also points to the possibility of descent from mural paintings.

We need to acknowledge that even the earliest known extant paintings of Basohli School, represent a technically mature style, which would have in all likelihood taken hundreds of years for the artists to perfect.

In 'Mysterious Origins: Tantric Devi Series from Basohli', Terence McInerney notes, "...Brijinder Nath Goswamy, Eberhard Fischer, and others has sketched a continuum of Miniature Painting activity in the Punjab hills from about the year 1620 onward...Any initiatory influence, anything prior to this, is ascribed to a mysterious outside influence. Earlier, the critics had posited the

arrival of a wandering artist from the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's court, they now posit the arrival of wandering artists from Gujarat or from somewhere else, to explain the sudden appearance of the early Basohli style in late 16th Century, suggesting that artists wandering to the Punjab Hills found a region so deficient in local taste or prejudice that it was putty for the hands of an outside artist to mould. Any theory of origin or influence requiring the intervention of a wandering artist also requires a framing account of an ongoing, local tradition. If there had been no interest in painting in the Punjab Hills, there would have been no need for the Devi Mahatmya artist, or his father, or later colleagues from Gujarat, to wander there."

Terence argues that such focus on outside interlopers obscures the existence of wall painting, wood/stone carving, manuscript illustration and other known art traditions in the Punjab Hills. "With this background in place, there is no need to introduce artists wandering from Gujarat, 'who had worked for several years in the Mughal ateliers,' to explain the sudden appearance of miniature paintings in the Punjab Hills. Whenever they were needed, obliging artists were already in place: local men, standing with paint brush and chisel in hand," he asserts.

The antiquity and indigeneity of Basohli School of Painting, as such, is beyond any doubt. It goes back than 17th-18th Century, sans Mughal roots.

Historians have observed that Basohli was a sanctuary for Hindu culture and art, standing out in the country for art patronage, bountiful creations and rejection of Mughal influence. Basohli masterpieces, adorning the prestigious walls and collections across India and the world, have been mostly painted around the themes of Hindu Pantheon, Rasamanjari, Ragamala, Ramayana, Tantric manifesta-

tions, Gita Govinda, and portraits of local rulers.

In 'Indian Court Paintings, 16th-19th Century' Steven Kossak writes, "In contrast to the assimilationist tendency of the Rajasthani ateliers, the Punjab Hills workshops turned their backs on Mughal influence. The Basohli idiom seems quite clearly to reject Mughal conventions in favor of a style solidly within the mainstream of indigenous Rajput tradition, one that appeals directly to the senses by means of color and pattern. The same holds true for subject matter. These paintings mostly illustrate religious texts rather than embracing Mughal subject matter as most of the Rajasthani ateliers had." (For Terence, Kossak and the like, 'Punjab Hills' meant footholds of the Western Himalayas, where Basohli is a former principality, and not the Punjab itself.)

Describing his collection of 'Basohli Primitives' as he termed them, Ghose writes in 'The Basohli School of Rajputs Painting', "They represent the oldest style of the purely Hindu Painting of Western Himalayas, and are certainly least conventionalised."

Hehas emphasized, "...Basohli is a distinctive school, a great virile exponent of traditional art. Indian painting would have been poorer if the art of Basohli had not existed."

The distinctive style of Basohli School of Painting and its historical importance in the annals of Indian Painting tradition have always survived the wear and tear of debates and unsound labels. The art historians and art appraisers, those who truly understand art and history, have established a different pedestal of respect and recognition for the Basohli School of Painting.

They have underlined how the Basohli style, which has no parallel anywhere in the world to this day, was gradually supplanted or mutated by other Schools in the later half of 18th Century. "The chief proponents of this new idiom with close affinities to Mughal Court Paintings were two brothers, Manaku and Nainsukh, Pahari artists from Guler. Afterwards, it was very largely a continuation of their work by their children, schooled in that new idiom," Kossak has suggested.

Then who has supplied the falsehood of 'fusion of Hindu Mythology Mughal techniques' in the Basohli School of Painting? To justify the monumental blunder, who knows, a past is being invented where Mughals loved, encouraged and practised Hindu art and religious traditions.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi led Union Government has introduced slew of reforms to bolster the ecosystem of GI Tags, and to bring India's heritage to global platform. The fact that it took four long years, and still not get the facts straight is a severe indictment of the way J&K Government, the Directorate of H&H Jammu, to be precise, has gone about the business of securing a fundamentally flawed GI Tag for Basohli School of Painting.

Or, is it yet another move by bigots to disappear the heritage and history of the whole of Jammu Province? Because if Basohli goes, can the rest of Jammu be far behind?

Erasure of the primary Basohli style, the centuries of its presence, its magnificence, subversion of the claim to fame of its artists, vandalization of the Basohli history, and a forced Mughal connection is what precisely the erroneous GI tag will do in coming years if not remedied immediately.

Historic Radio speeches by World leaders

Ashok Ogra

Radio services that started in the early 1920s made it possible to listen to leaders and politicians in real time. Their ability to engage and entertain became crucial components of their success. The way their voices sounded made more of a difference. A proof that with radio, the listener absorbs everything!

It is therefore no surprise that MANN KI BAAT that features Prime Minister Modi dialogue with citizens across the country on various topics of importance, has generated high impact points. It re-established the supremacy of the spoken word at a time when visual narrative and social media are seen as the new emperors.



Emperor of Japan Michinomiya Hirohito speaks to survivors of the atomic bomb explosion in Hiroshima on Dec. 9, 1947. This is the Emperor's first public speech.

And nobody would have been happier to see the spoken word regain its true standing than Socrates, who loved conversation. He believed that you can't find yourself when you write; only when you converse. And that is the true power of the spoken word. It is a different matter that both his disciples- Plato and Aristotle- preferred writing to communicating complex ideas.

Before the advent of radio, the principal medium for mass political news was the printed word. However, by the 1930s, politicians could address citizens directly through radio. The Great Depression prompted US President Roosevelt to conceive of 'fireside chats.' Roosevelt spoke with familiarity to millions of American listeners about recovery from the New Deal initiatives and, of course, the course of World War II.



December 1, 1947 Maharaja Hari Singh goes on air from Radio Jammu.

When an attempt was made to assassinate Hitler, he delivered a historic six minute speech on radio: "for the third time an attempt on my life has been planned and carried out. If I speak to you today, it is first in order that you hear my voice and that you should know that I am myself unhurt and well..." Towards the end of the speech he began shouting excitedly.

It was Emperor Hirohito who on August 15, 1945 gave a radio broadcast of surrender. This was the first time a Japanese emperor had ever addressed the nation by radio.

To mark the founding day of the People's Republic of Korea on October 14 1945, President Kim Il Sung delivered an historic speech: "All the Korean people must heighten their vigilance and keep sharp watch on every movement of the US imperialists."

In communist China, when Chairman Mao ascended the rostrum at Tiananmen Square on October 1, 1949 and declared the founding of the People's Republic of China, his speech went out live on the radio. Microphones were also placed around the square to capture audience enthusiasm and the accompanying military parade.

Incidentally, radios were so popular that they were made into one of the 'four Items' (that includes bicycles, sewing machine and wristwatch) that a man was expected to provide a prospective wife.

It was left to then Viceroy Lord Mountbatten, who in a special radio broadcast over All India Radio of 3rd June, 1947 informed anxious millions that India would be a free nation by 15 August, 1947. The most memorable moment for Akashvani was when Mahatma Gandhi visited the studios of Akashvani, Delhi, first and last time, on 12 November 1947.

On reaching the studios Gandhi said about the radio, "It is a wondrous thing. In it I see Shakti- the miraculous power of God." He spoke for 20 minutes in which he appealed to the refugees camping at Kurukshetra to face their suffering 'with as much fortitude and patience' as they could summon. To commemorate Gandhi's visit to AIR studio, 12 November is observed as Public Service Broadcasting Day in the country.

All India Radio archives have a recording of emotion-filled tribute delivered by Prime Minister Nehru when Gandhi ji was assassinated: "The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere. I do not know what to tell you and how to say it. Our beloved leader, Bapu, as we called him, the Father of the Nation, is no more..."

Soon after the partition in 1947, Pakistan sent tribals into J&K and launched a virulent anti-India propaganda through a strong network of radio stations located in Lahore and Peshawar. To deal with this critical situation, the then Maharaja Hari Singh set up two radio stations- Jammu on December 1, 1947 and Srinagar on July 1, 1948. The first formal broadcast over Radio Kashmir, Jammu was by Maharaja Hari Singh, who asked the people to stay united against Pakistani intruders.

The name Radio Kashmir was purposefully chosen to give the impression that the station was indigenously manned and operated by the people of J&K. This was done more-so since Pakistani media was operating its programs through 'Radio Azad Kashmir'.

(Incidentally, post the abrogation of Article 370, Radio Kashmir has now been rechristened Akashvani).

Equally moving was the speech delivered over Akashvani by Prime Minister Nehru on October 22, 1962 within two days of the Chinese invasion. In his broadcast, he asserted India's territorial rights on the Indo-China border: "I am speaking to you on the radio after a long interval. I feel, however, that I must speak to you about the grave situation that has arisen on our frontiers because of continuing and unabashed aggression by the Chinese forces.... But to conserve that freedom and integrity of our territory, we must

gird up our loins and face this great menace that has come to us since we became independent."

Even when Doordarshan was fairly well established, Mrs. Indira Gandhi preferred to announce the imposition of emergency over Akashvani at 8am on June 26, 1975: "Brothers and sisters, the President has declared a state of emergency. There is no reason to be terrorized by this." These ominous words resonated on the airwaves on that fateful Thursday morning.

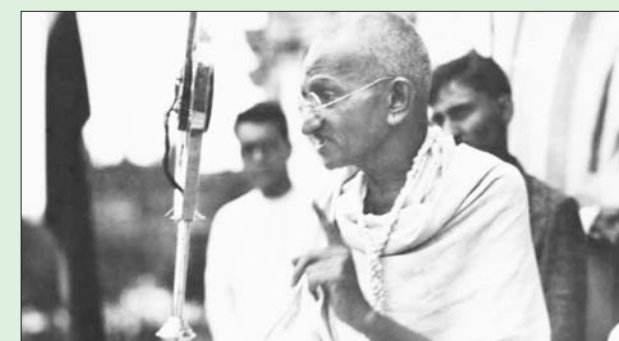
It is no surprise that noted media theorist and author McLuhan described radio as a "hot" medium, because broadcast speeches could incite passions in a way that also made possible the rise of dictators such as Mussolini and Hitler. It is believed that television contracts the imagination and radio expands it.

Government "of the people, by the people, and for the people"- as Lincoln put it - can thrive only when voters are informed by a truly robust exchange of ideas. While MANN KI BAAT managed to restore the SOVEREIGNTY of the spoken word, the fact remains that most Indian television channels and social media shun reasoned dialogue and debate. The challenge is how to restore the PRIMACY of the IMAGE so that it empowers the citizens to take informed decisions.

Radio in India has played a significant role in promoting national integration, in highlighting our rich cultural heritage and diversity and in popularizing new schemes of the government. We are all too familiar with the active role Akashvani played during the Green Revolution of the 1960s. Unfortunately, as of today, both All India Radio and Doordarshan are not receiving the serious attention from the government. They are both suffering manpower shortage resulting in poor content creation, and badly lag in technical up-gradation.

Both the organizations are in need of a major surgical intervention- necessary prerequisite to equip them to effectively engage and converse with its audiences. It's mission must be informed by Indian values and interconnected to India's future. Meanwhile, the recent decision of the central government to substitute references to ALL INDIA RADIO with AKASHVANI has come as a big surprise. One fails to understand how it is going to improve the organizations' standing and stature that it once enjoyed. It reminds one of R.K.Laxman's cartoons: "If one can't change the condition of the road, change its name."

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Mahatma Gandhi in AIR studio on November 12, 1947



89 years ago President Franklin D. Roosevelt held the first of his 'fireside chats' on radio.