

Compositional Beauty of Paintings at Guru Ram Rai Durbar, Dehradun

Ar. Ramanjot Shrivastava¹, Prof. SYK Kulkarni² and Dr. Prabhjot Kaur³

¹Professor, Hingiri Zee University, DDN

²Professor (Retd), IIT Roorkee

³Director, IKGPTU, Mohali Campus-II

Abstract—For centuries, cultural heritage has inspired our lives, which pass through generations to generations. Cultural heritage has imprinted its worth in society by showcasing our rich traditions with legacy. One such very less recognized Schools of Painting- Garhwal School of Paintings developed in Srinagar, Garhwal during late 17th century and flourished down to 19th century. There was a combination of Mughlai realism and symbolism of classical medieval literature with a usage of appropriate bright colors. Garhwal Painting is meticulous in detailing and delicate in brush work. Use of bright colors with tempera effect with display of unusual understanding of color combinations and delicacy of drawing with decorative details are some of the great merits of this art. Such exemplary work of art appreciation is noticed at Guru Ram Rai Durbar, Dehradun, a monument constructed by Aurangzeb for Guru Ram Rai, son of Guru Hargobind. Wall paintings through fresco techniques in this Durbar have been traced from ancient times and show the linkages from Garhwal School of Paintings. Due to lack of proper initiatives for conservation, the art is slowly fading away. The author makes an effort to review the Heritage Paintings at Guru Ram Rai Durbar and highlighting the need for safeguarding these old paintings to ensure that the cultural importance of this heritage place is preserved for future generations.

Keywords: Paintings, Frescos, Murals, Cultural Heritage, Garhwal school of Painting, Rajput-Pahari-Basohi and Kangra School of Painting, Guru Ram Rai Durbar Dehradun, Conservation Introduction.

Introduction

‘Heritage’ is a comprehensive concept which comprises the culture, historical sites and places, architecture and landscape. Our tangible and intangible Cultural Heritage showcases the visual representation of artistic, aesthetic and cultural expression of the society. Artistic representation is an alluring process of art that furnishes the exteriors and interiors in a more attractive and ornate manner that influence the viewers. Painting is an innovative expression of showcasing our emotions and demonstrating the art by applying paint and color to the surface. Any such work done on the wall, ceiling and other permanent surface which specially prepared plaster surface is termed as ‘Mural’. The word ‘Mural’ denotes *murus* in Latin language, which means wall. Mural painting can be

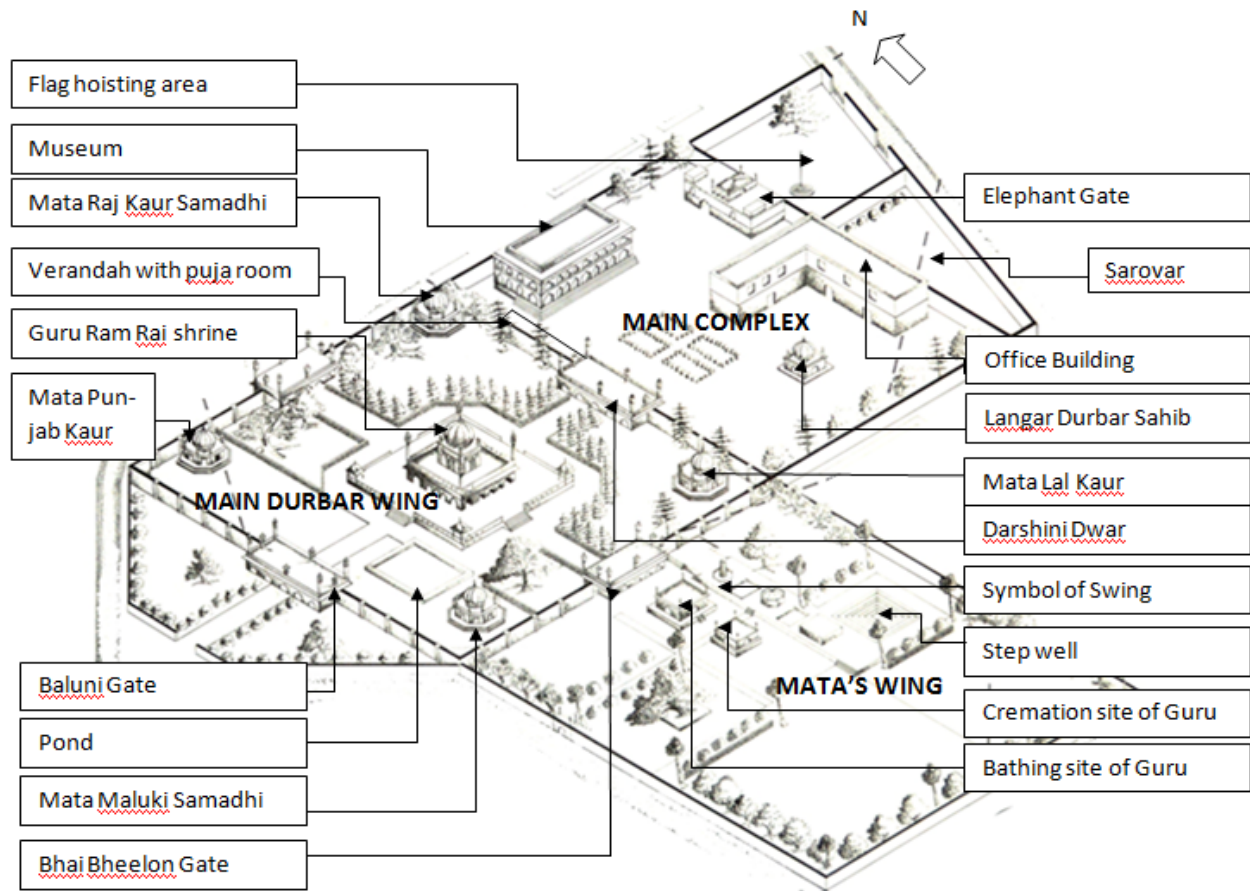
elementally classified as Encaustic, Fresco and Tempera paintings. Fresco is done with wet lime plaster or freshly laid plaster on walls and ceilings. Adams (1999) suggests murals as Frescos and defines that a mural can be made as an intrinsic part of the surface of a wall, ceiling, or floor. Connected to the cultural heritage, wall paintings in Guru Ram Rai Durbar, Dehradun have been traced from ancient times. Guru Ram Rai Durbar is described as a monument of friendship, built by Aurangzeb in honor of his friend, Shri Guru Ram Rai, who was Udasin fakir and the son of Sikh’s seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai Ji. This monument is a unique example of Mughal-Sikh-Pahari culture and was completed in 1707AD. The general layout of Guru Ram Rai’s mausoleum along with the adjoining garden is similar to the other mausoleums built by the Mughals.



Sketch 1: Isometric view of Guru Ram Rai Durbar, Dehradun



Sketch 2: Isometric Sectional View of Durbar Premises



Sketch 3: Isometric view of Durbar Premises, Dehradun

Garhwal School of Paintings

Origin

The murals of Durbar show linkages from the Garhwal School of Painting in which figurative themes from Indian lore and floral, geometrical motifs and forms subscribing to the Persian style are used by the Muslim Painters. Garhwal School of Painting is one of the very less recognized schools of Painting. In 1658, when son of Mughal Prince Dara Shikoh, Prince Sulaiman Sheikh was exiled, took refuge at Srinagar in Garhwal, after escaping from his uncle Aurangzeb. Two painters-father Shyam Das Tomar and son Har Das Tomar, accompanied him. He was sheltered by Raja Prithvi Shah, who then was a ruler of Garhwal. But later Sulaiman went back but two painters continued to stay and were appointed as Tasvirdars (The one who paints a photo), at the king's court in Srinagar. Later they introduced Mughal style of painting in Garhwal, Utrakhnad. The successors of the artisans, became expert painters and developed an original style of their own, using very natural (yet bright) colors. Later, it came to be known as the Garhwal School of Painting. Further when King of Garhwal Pradhyman Shah (1797-1804) got married to

Guler Princess of Kangra, who introduced many artists from Guler and their techniques greatly influenced the Garhwal style of painting. Tulsi Ram, who was also known as Phattu Shah, is examined as the last painter of the Garhwal School and was the craftsman maker of the paintings. His name, Tulsi Ram is engraved on the murals in Hindi and Urdu. He was the great grandson of the best painters of Garhwal School Maula Ram. Tulsi Ram was born in 1881 and died in 1950 which is the evidence that all the paintings were made in the late 19th century and completed by 20th Century. The mural painting of Shri Guru Ram Rai Durbar Sahib's Gaddi was made in three phases i.e. from the beginning of the seventeenth century to mid-nineteenth century (Walking with Laata, Been There Doon That (2019).

Distinctive Features

Paintings of Garhwal are basically the offshoot of the Guler – Kangra (Pahari) School of paintings of Himachal Pradesh. Special features of Garhwal School include beautiful women with thin waist line, oval shaped face with thin nose, delicate brows with a balance of warm and cold colors. Ideal beauty was fused with religion and



Figure 1: Ideal beauty fused with religion and romance, poetry and passion.

Source: Author

romance, poetry and passion.

Nature's transparent grandeur and glory reflects the paintings. This blend showed the unblemished approach towards bold spiritual Indian attitude towards love. (Website of District Pauri

<http://www.Pauri.nic.in>

Techniques and Colors used

Darbar Sahib bear unique and rare examples of 350 year old Pahari, Kangra, Mughal and Rajasthani style of mural paintings and symbolizes the color scheme of Kangra Guler and mughal styles of art. In Kangra Guler Paintings, paintings were employed with cool, fresh colors, extracted from vegetables, minerals and possessed enamel- like luster. In Durbar also, the technique of painting in vegetable dyes was used over fresh lime plaster, which after hardening gave a laminate protection to the paint. These paintings are more naturalized version of paintings in which a visible difference in the eyes and modeling of face is highlighted. To achieve delicacy in faces, and portraying the feminine charm with natural grace, they were modeled and shaded. This style focused on the grace, sophistication and elegance of the Indian women to express the sense of mystical rhythm. Theme of art is abided to poetry whereas technique achieved a new delicacy.

Evidences of Paintings at Dehradun

Many monuments, temples and their paintings are the only record of this great tradition of wall paintings in Dehradun. It may be old havelis at Thano and Raipur, Guru Ram Rai Durbar, Rangarhwala Temple, next to IMA Cherwode Hall, Lakshami Narayan Temple near Kaulagarh Gate at FRI, Radha Krishna Temple on Tilak Road, Kelaghat Temple in Rajpur, Thakurwara Temple in old Rajpur. These paintings are of great significance, as they are found no where except in the Doon valley (Walking with Laata, Been There Doon That (2019).

Guru Ram Rai Durbar

Gurudwara Ram Rai Durbar was established by Shri Guru Ram Rai. But Gurudwara converted to Shrine of Guru and his four wives, when English came to reign by defeating Nepal in 1816. His followers have been known as Udasis or Ram Raiyyas, started their own traditions, separate from Sikhism and they follow the Sanatani way of life, worshipping the 'Mahants' who successively established Ram Rai's Gaddi after his death. The Darbar Sahib is situated like a fort between high walls and minarets. It is a unique example of Mughal- Sikh- Pahari culture which is considered as

Architectural cultural heritage. Very similar to other mausoleums built by Mughals is the general layout of Guru Ram Rai mausoleum and the adjoining garden. According to Cunningham, the design of Guru's Samadhi appears to have been inspired by Jahangir's Tomb at Shahdara Bagh, Lahore. Both the gardens, the one surrounding the monument and one adjoining, are strikingly Mughal in their Layout, representing the Charbagh or Four Gardens' concept. The architectural coding contains Mughal impressions at most of the features like roof, dome and pillars. The main gate, the walls, the interior and the ceilings of Darbar Sahib bear unique and rare examples of 350 year old Pahari, Kangri, Mughal and Rajasthani style of mural paintings (Been There Doon That.(2019) They depict mythological and historical events, stories and impressive floral designs and have historical significance and importance to the society.



Figure 2: Elephant Gate to Darbar

Source: Author

Jhanda Mela

One of the famous fairs in North India, is the 'Jhanda Ka Mela' in Dehradun, an annual honored religious fair celebrated in February / March in the memory of Guru Ram Rai on his Birthday. Besides being the birthday of Guru Maharaj (Guru Ram Rai),



Figure 3: Elephant Gate on the West with place for flag mast in the centre

Source: Author

it is also considered as the day of his arrival in Dehradun. In 1733 A.D., on that day, the great occasion was celebrated in his honor and since then, to commemorate his memory, Jhanda is hoisted every year.

Around 10 lac pilgrimages from Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and even from abroad arrive here few days prior to Jhanda hoisting.

These crowds belong to all age group consisting of men, women and children and are called 'Sangat' (devotees, followers, admirers and saints). Jhanda Gate/Elephant Gate and Jhanda Mela area share the same place



Figure 4: Jhanda Mela
Source: Author

Paintings at Durbar

Guru Ram Rai Durbar itself is a remarkable monument but what really takes ones breath away are the exquisite wall paintings, murals that embellish the walls of the complex. These paintings don't only belong to Garhwal School of paintings but are much more. They are a unique mix of the Rajput-Pahari-Basohli and Kangra School of Paintings(Walking with Laata, Been There Doon That (2019). They offer a rare mix of styles ranging from Tanjore to Persian to the Marathi style, apart from the Garhwal style. Very rare sights in Indian art are depicted in the form of paintings(Walking with Laata, Been There Doon That (2019). The main gate, the walls, the interior and the ceilings of the Durbar Sahib bear unique and rare examples of 350 years old Pahari, Kangra, Mughal and Rajasthani style of mural paintings. They are profusely decorated with various styles of paintings in attractive colors which depict mythological and historical events, stories and impressive floral designs. They have historical significance and importance to the society. 'Garhwal ke prarambhak chitra' authored by Shri PP Kamboj states; these paintings are based on the style of hills and deeply affected by Mughal style. Natural colors have been used. On this subject painter and the expert of 'Art Shri' HN Mishra states, 'the mural paintings of Shri Durbar Sahib reflect (religious) harmony. They are the living tribute to the eye of the painter who is a keen admirer of nature and studied with great depth and adoration. The diversity is mind-boggling and so are the colors and human forms. Inside the Durbar premises, there are many spaces, where the paintings are portrayed.

1. Elephant /Jhanda Gate
2. Museum
3. Darshini Dwar and Baluni Dwar
4. Main mausoleum and Samadhis

1. Elephant/Jhanda/Entrance Gate: Entrance to the Durbar is through its Western Gate (Elephant Gate)*which is a specimen of Mughal and Rajasthani Style of Architecture. In its centre there is a place for the flag mast. Walls and ceilings are profusely decorated with various paintings in bright natural colors depicting diverse mythological and historic events preserving the impressions of earlier art traditions.



Figure 5: Shri Jhanda Dwar

Source: Author

There are portraits of Gods, Goddesses, saints, sages and religious fables on the walls. There are pictures of flowers and leaves, animals and birds, trees, similar looking faces with pointed noses and big eyes on the arches which symbolizes the color scheme of Garhwal School of Painting. All the mural paintings of Shri Durbar Sahib have great variety and appear to be lively. These have the reflection of Mughal miniature paintings, Punjabi, Rajasthani style and local arts of the hills. An important place is given to these paintings of Garhwal. On the Jhanda Darwaza, varied subjects of the paintings are portrayed. Paintings made on the gateway are based on variety of subjects and can be categorized as-

Religious paintings: stories of Jhanda mela and paintings of Shri Mahants, sadhus, sadhwis, Mahabharat, Gita, Ramayana

Paintings depicting emperor/empresses: Noorjahan, Maharaja Ranjit Singh

Paintings depicting Britishers: English women and men

Paintings depicting Love affairs: Heer Ranjha, Laila Majnu, and Krishna Leela.

A special affection for the female nayikas form has been represented on the murals. It is famous for depicting feminine grace and poise. There are portraits of important persons of the valley and the officials of Durbar. It is possible an idol painting is kept at Shri Jhanda Dwar or Elephant Gate which is the main entrance of Shri Durbar Sahib Premises

Religious Harmony in Idols Painting:

Jhanda Darwaza depicts the paintings with harmony in religions. Seeing from the Christian women to Hindu to Muslim queens, there are invariable paintings belonging to all religions of society. There is a mural painting of



Figure 6: Mural painting of Noor Jahan

Noor Jahan on one side of the main gate. In the entire country, this is the only painting in which Noor Jahan has been shown wearing 'Kumaoni Nath'. On the background, a live painting all around it completes the painting. The art experts are of the opinion that it is a unique painting of Jahangir's beautiful queen.

The second feature of this painting is that it has been given a place in the Upasana Sthal (Place of Worship) of Udaseen sect. This is a fine example of India's religious tolerance. Noor -E-Jahan which means light of the world and glory, was famous for her beauty and wisdom. In the books of history her portrait with rose in her hand is very common. But the mural painting in Shri Durbar Sahib displays her in an absolutely different way. This portrait is a testimony of the proximity of Mughal Empire and Shri Durbar Sahib. Not only Mughal ladies but also Britisher



Figure 7: Painting of British women

women are painted on the walls of the gate, evidencing the religious harmony. The wall paintings of Durbar offer an interesting mix of South and North, east and west.

In addition to Noor Jahan, Shiva Parvati, Sita Ram and Laxman, Radha Krishna Heer Ranjha, are displayed on the walls of this Durbar.



Figure 8: Mural painting of Shiva Parvati



Figure 9: Sita Ram Laxman



Figure 10: Krishna glancing Radha from the openings of windows

Highlighting the romance of Krishna and Radha has been described by Surdas also in his epic where many instances of Krishna and Radha glancing at each other from the openings of windows have been also depicted in paintings.

The main feature of the paintings at Elephant gate is that Radha is in one side of main gate and Krishna is standing on the other side and the windows are based on hill style. On the other two windows are standing the two Mahants. These are one of the best murals of Guru Ram Rai Durbar



Figure 11: Radha glancing Krishna from the openings of windows

Paintings of collective dance in Indra Sabha and Krishna Leela and many more rare paintings are there which are perhaps not to be seen anywhere.



Figure 12: Collective dance in Indra Sabha, Krishna Leela

Paintings such as elimination of Tarika by Lord Ram and Laxman, Parvati wearing Garwali nose ring and other ornaments breast feeding infant Ganesha are some typical paintings hardly seen anywhere.

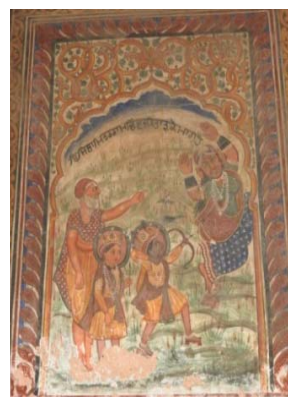


Figure 13: Elimination of Tarika



Figure 14: Feeding infant Ganesha

Source: Author

Depiction of Nature: The idols paintings are bordered beautifully with the live floral designs all around to complete the paintings. Ceilings are also aesthetically decorated all over with the floral patterns.

2. Museum: The portraits of all the Mahants are displayed on its walls. The museum is used for religious meetings, discourses, festivals and functions. Museum is a two storied structure used as a sitting area by Shri Guru Ram Rai. Inside the museum, ground floor exhibits paintings of all ten Mahants. On the façade frescos from tales of Hindu mythology and Sikh Guru sakhis are painted as well.



Figure 15: Museum

Source: Author

Religious Harmony in Idols Painting:

Paintings of Sikh Gurus, Guru Nanak Dev ji, his events of life in the form of Janam Sakhis and Hindu Gods and Goddesses are portrayed simultaneously on the verandah walls of museum in the Jhanda ji premises. There is a contrast of Sikh Janam Sakhis on one arch and Hindu mythology depiction on another arch again evidencing the religious harmony. Brahma and Vishnu along with their Goddesses, take the position on top of one arch, whereas Guru Nanak Dev Janam sakhis on the adjacent arch top.



Figure 16: Frescos from tales of Hindu mythology

There is a mindboggling harmony in diversity seen on arches of the museum. Twin square columns on walls forming an arch are painted in floral designs with bright colors that bring life to the verandah.

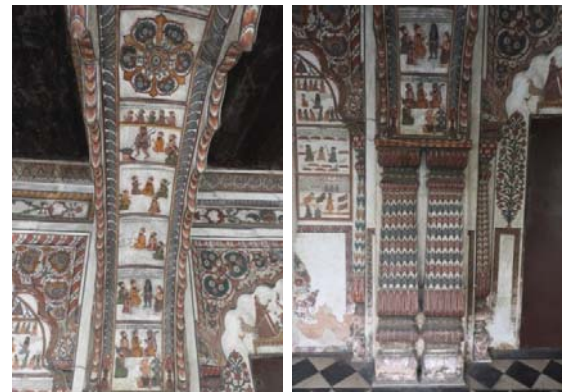


Figure 17: Janam Sakhis of Guru Nanak Dev Ji

Depiction of Nature:

Tones and thickness of line gives effect of depth in the floral paintings by subtly increasing the pressure of the brush from dots to tots. Birds –pigeons, mynahs, parakeets and bulbuls and free flying birds is a very common scene in Dehradun valley. This scene is depicted in one such mural that forms in a middle of the motif on the ceiling with 6 parakeets standing face to face. Tulsi Ram was a keen bird watcher.



Figure 18: 6 Parakeets with different faces on the ceiling

He painted a Plum headed parakeet, Rose ringed Parakeet, a White headed Parakeet, a slaty headed one and one red breasted – plum-headed Parakeet to give variety to the design. Many more surprises wait while observing the very rare first murals in the history of Indian miniatures.

3. Darshini Gate and Baluni Gate: Darshini Gate or Baluni Gate is the entrance to the main Mausoleum.



Figure 19: Darshini and Baluni Gate

Religious Harmony in Idols Painting

Other than Jhanda Gate/ Elephant gate, no idol has been portrayed in any of the other four gates leading to main shrine.

Depiction of Nature:

Tulsi Ram painter was a nature lover. Rich flora of the region has been depicted in interlocking patterns and motifs that there seems to be no jarring effect even with changing size and architectural shape of minarets and arches that form the entrance gates to the main complex.



Figure 20: Minarets with floral designs, interlocking patterns and motifs

4. Main mausoleum and Samadhi: In the premises there are four more samadhies in addition to the Samadhi of Sri Guru Ram Rai Ji. The main mausoleum and of his four wives along with the Mughal gateways are painted in the mughal style with floral motifs. Out of the four wives Mata Raj Kaur, Mata Lal Kaur, Mata Maluki, Mata Punjab Kaur mausoleums, the work of Mata Raj Kaur mausoleum is incomplete and that of Mata Maluki is devoid of any paintings with unknown reasons.



Figure 21: Mata Punjab Kaur



Figure 22: Mata Raj Kaur



Figure 23: Samadhi Mata Lal Kaur



Figure 24: Samadhi Mata Maluki



Figure 25: Paintings of floral designs in Samadhi



Figure 26: Paintings of floral designs and interlocking patterns in main Mausoleum



Figure 27: Paintings of floral designs in Mausoleum Ceiling

Religious Harmony in Idols Painting: All samadhies are devoid of any idol paintings as in Islamic culture such paintings are not allowed.

Depiction of Nature:

In this regard, Durbar displays the decoration through fresco techniques depicting figurative images and images of plants, birds and animals. These walls and corridors ornamented with frescos revealed the exquisite examples of art and craftsmanship. These samadhies have a large number of paintings of flowers except one which is simple. Half a century was taken in completing the paintings of these samadhies but there is no painting of idol.

Present Condition

These paintings bore the brunt of time and weather. They are in a very bad pitiful state of maintenance. Most of the murals have already disappeared. Those that remain are on verge of extinction, due to natural process of decay.



Figure 28: Present conditions of Paintings

Previous Efforts to conserve Paintings

This restoration of unique murals once started by 10th mahant, Mahant Devender Das. The work was entrusted to Archeological Survey of India (ASI) in 2010, but was not a success because of covering the structure of limestone with plaster; led to the severe seepage and so the colors used by ASI came off. But due to the moisture collected in these encasings, the paintings though conserved are gradually fading with time. These ornamental and enchanting murals are suffering neglect and gradual decay. Due to weathering effect and human apathy, paintings have been found in unsatisfactory condition and the charm of these murals is being degraded.



The railing in front of the Jhanda Dwar, securing the paintings has been assigned so that it is kept away from the people reach.

Work on Minarets and till the lintel height has now been encased with polycarbonate sheet, so that effect of people intrusions and weather can be reduced.



Recommendations

The Garhwal School of paintings portraying art in Guru Ram Rai Durbar is of great importance for their unique artistic style and amalgamation. It is the world class in itself. It translates into its colors and lines the legends of ages, faith prevailed during generations, eternal yearnings of love, tranquility of soul, modification and transmutation of temporal aspiration, dimensions of minute human efforts, emotions, pain and joy. Studying the behavioral patterns of common people visiting

Durbar, author has identified the reasons or factors, which cause the degradation of these heritage paintings, over a period of time.

These factors are-

- Mismanagement of crowd at the time of Jhanda Mela
- Jhanda Mela and Jhanda Gate share the same area.
- Lack of Maintenance and Awareness among public.

Lack of proper conservation and maintenance of paintings, calls for an urgent initiative to conserve this magnificent art work. The above problems can be tackled by conserving the cultural heritage with proper maintenance and conservation techniques to enhance the long term value of these paintings. The mismanagement of crowd can be tackled by planned Pedestrian Layout plan. Paintings should be conserved under the guidance of a well known painting conservationist.

Conclusions

Culture and society are connected to each other through beliefs, religions, social values and customs. Cultural heritage provides a sense of belongingness and unity to understand previous generations and their ways. (Earl & Saint, 2015; Vecco, 2010). Religious sites are associated with history, living and breathing in their structures and rituals as well. We can link the past of the culture with its future by processing the structural and art elements. This requires an involvement of various parts of society, be it devotees, the religious body, the business association or conservation professionals.

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