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## Bangdwari: the living tradition of Kangra



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**Abstract.** In communities that maintain a traditional way of life, usually rural, folk art related to beliefs and customs is widespread. Among the various forms of folk art, or naive art as it is also called, there are also monumental paintings and paintings of dwellings. The development of this type of art reached a high level in some places and even formed characteristic stylistic trends. In the article, for the first time in the Russian-language literature on art history, the Bangdwari style developed in India is presented. Bangdwari is a traditional painting that is prevalent among rural communities in the district Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. It is an integral part of daily and festive rituals. The paintings are typically created by women who have no specialized artistic training but continue the traditions of folk artisans. This article describes the technological process of creating murals and showcases the high artistic taste of folk masters.

Floral ornamental ribbons are often used in paintings to highlight important structural elements of buildings, such as window and door openings. Inside dwellings, large floral compositions are used to decorate the most significant walls. The compositions have a clearly defined centre and vertical aspiration, which embodies established traditions. Additionally, they allow us to notice their connection with the most ancient plant ornamental motifs, which symbolised the image of the world tree in many cultures. The animalistic pictorial genre is clearly distinguished in Kangra painting. It features detailed ‘portraits’ of living creatures, including birds, animals, and fish, showcasing their habits and movements. The masters aim for high artistic expressiveness and strive to find an organic connection between the animals and the space they inhabit. The greatest value is represented by plot compositions made with great skill. They represent various events from everyday life, as well as from folklore and epic heritage. The article substantiates the connection of these compositions with the Kangra school of Indian miniature painting. The article documents the technological, artistic, and attitudinal features that define the living tradition of the stylistic direction in Bangdwari folk art.

**Keywords:** folk art of India, Bangdwari, fresco, painting, ornament, animalistic image, plot composition, colour, symbolism

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### Introduction

Since time immemorial, man remained involved in beautifying and decorating his surroundings. Painting directly on the walls, both interior, exterior, and ceilings with intricate designs comes in the genre of murals. Murals or wall painting had global patronage and both professional and folk artists are the custodians of this art [1; 2]. Romans, Egyptians, Greeks and Indians have venerable patronage of murals. Depiction of mythological characters, nature, and its elements has been the theme of wall paintings. These paintings also portray the scenes from the daily life of a particular era. The origin of mural art can be traced to the Palaeolithic age when man used to engrave rocks, stones, and caves. These artworks were based on the “*fresco secco*”, i.e., use of natural colours/pigments and binders on the dry-plastered walls. The 7th-century paintings at Ajanta caves portraying the jataka tales illustrate the mural art genre. However, the existence of murals in India is believed to be much before, around the 2nd century [3]. With the shifting of a man’s dwelling, the site of wall painting also shifted from caves to houses or palaces. Likewise, murals of gods and goddesses on temples were regarded sacred for these depicted the mythological narratives. In India, both *Fresco secco* and *Buno fresco* techniques of murals are common. Each artwork reverberates the artistic, cultural, and mystical susceptibility of an area, and wall paintings or murals are no exception to this [4]. *Bangdwari* wall paintings or murals of district Kangra remained confined to nature, spirituality, and folklore. Most of these paintings drive inspiration from the nature worship, adoration of local deities, lifecycle rituals and sacraments, viz. birth and death, marriage, fasts, feasts, etc. These paintings not only beautify the surroundings of rural communities but also provide livelihood options to folk artists. The vibrancy of mountain culture is reflected in the wall paintings that symbolize the latent artistic talent of a common man who hasn’t received any formal training in this field. *Bangdwari* is a natural expression of originality and creativity. Each of *Bangdwari* wall painting has a sensation and exclusivity which imparts it a matchless excellence. In order to assess the origin and development of *Bangdwari*, a study was carried out in selected sites of Kangra, where people and artists were interviewed to know about the technique, themes and significance of *Bangdwari*.

Kangra is one of the twelve administrative districts of Himachal Pradesh. Kangra district lies between 31° 21' to 32° 59' N latitude and 75° 47' 55" to 77° 45' E longitude. It is situated on the southern escarpment of the Himalayas. The entire area of the district is traversed by the varying altitude of the Shiwalik, *Dhauladhar* and the Himalayas from north-west to south-east. The altitude varies from 500 meters above mean sea level (amsl) to around 5000 meters amsl. It is encapsulated in the north by the districts of Chamba and Lahaul and Spiti, in the south

by Hamirpur and Una, in the east by Mandi and in the west by Gurdaspur district of Punjab. Kangra district came into existence on the 1st September, 1972 consequent upon the re-organization of districts by the Government of Himachal Pradesh. It was the largest district of the composite Punjab in terms of area till it was transferred to Himachal Pradesh on the 1st November, 1966.

### Bangdwari: a living tradition

Since time immemorial, *Bangdwari*, a form of folk art, is common in district Kangra. There has been a longstanding tradition of making *Bangdwari* and *Likhnu* on the walls and floors of houses using natural colours or locally available colours on auspicious occasions like marriage, the consecration of a new house, or housewarming, holy fasts, childbirth, hair-cutting ceremonies, etc. Designs and motifs of *Bangdwari* and *Likhnu* are passed on from one generation to another, which has kept the art and tradition alive. It has a significant role in the life of a rural community, particularly in the life of primitive societies when the mud walls were not painted and floor tiles were not used. The purpose of *Bangdwari* and *Likhnu* is beyond decoration. Traditionally, either powdered calcite and limestone or cereal powders were used for the giving a final shape to the design. Scientifically, the limestone prevents insects from entering inside. Design depictions of *Bangdwari* and *likhnu* may vary because these reflect traditions, folklore, and practices that are unique to an area. Even today, drawing floral patterns on the ground using flour, semolina, turmeric, etc. is still done by priests on different occasions from birth to death.

Besides this, the lady of the house decorates the clay utensils and mud walls of the kitchens using locally available clay and cow dung. Cow dung mixed with green colour is spread on the floor of the kitchen. Once it dries, the drawing is made on it using *chalith*, white-coloured rice paste. According to elderly women folk, it is done only on Monday, Sunday, Wednesday and Saturday and avoided on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Making of *Bangdwari* and *likhnu* on Tuesday or Friday is considered inauspicious for the men folk of the house and Thursday is considered unlucky for the cattle and livestock. The mud wall around the traditional kitchen stove and chimney is coated with clay. When it dries, horizontal and oblique straight lines are drawn with the fingers and afterwards creepers and floral patterns are painted. *Bangdwari* gets erased by the smoke of the stove. Traditionally, the walls of the kitchen are beautified through *Bangdwari*. For this purpose, locally available clay is kept soaked in an earthen vessel, which makes it readily available and can be used as and when required.

During the wedding, housewarming, haircutting or any other auspicious sacramental occasion, *Bangdwari* is done in advance. The illustrations are made by the local artists, locally named as *chitere*. Once the date



1. Depiction of Bangdwari and Radha Krishna [5]

2. Raja Jeet Singh of Chamba in Kangra style. 1794–1808 [6]

of function is fixed, the *chitere* are pre-engaged for the purpose by giving an advance of ₹ 11 or ₹ 21 or ₹ 51 or ₹ 101 called *sai* in local parlance. While giving the advance payment, it is ensured that the artist will undertake *Bangdwari* work two or three days before the occasion.

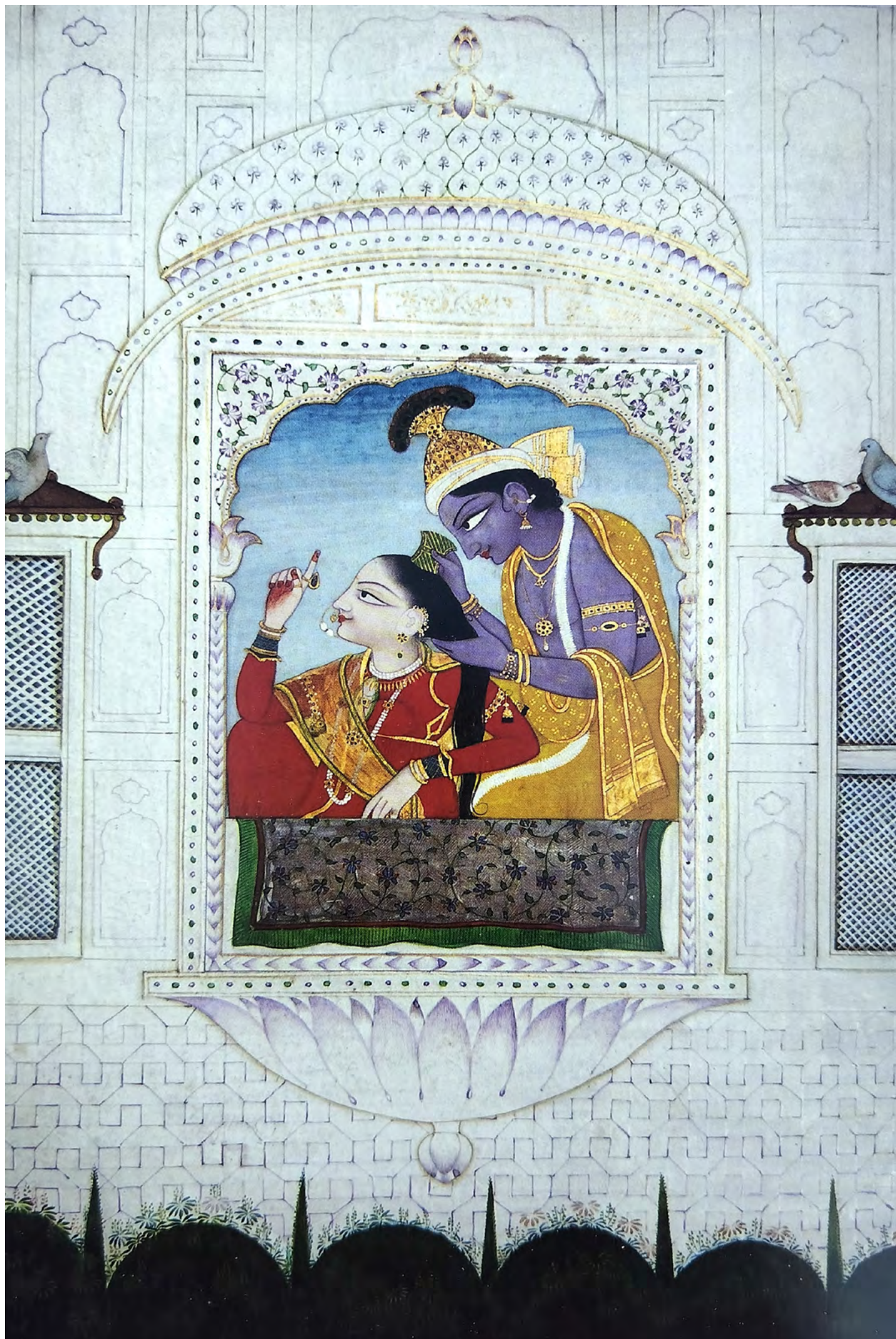
On scheduled date, *chitere* starts making *Bangdwari* according to the occasion. Before *chitere* starts his work, the family who has engaged him gives him '*Panetar*' consisting of a bowl full of rice, sacred red thread, a piece of cloth and a few rupees. Two locations are considered important for *Bangdwari*, the first is where the '*Panetar*' is kept, and the room where the wedding ceremony is to be performed, which is either east or north. *Bangdwari* is made around the doors and windows of the room. Apart from this, diverse forms of *likhnu* are common in the household courtyard and clay and bamboo utensils.

*Dehra* is made on the north-facing wall of a room where the marriage ceremony is to be organized. Usually, it is made at a height ranging from seven inches to about four feet or around two feet from the floor of the room, so that the priest performing the rituals can sit easily with bride and groom and perform worship. *Dehra's* wedding generally depicts the bride and groom, their parents, Lord Ganesh,

and priest, who are portrayed within the floral patterns. Likewise, the *dehra* painted on the occasion of the *Mundan* ceremony, depicts Lord Ganesh, a priest, and a barber shaving the child. Vines, flowers and leaves are made around this depiction. Sun, moon, aum and *swastik* are also drawn on the wall. The bride and groom are depicted either garlanding each other or moving around the sacred fire. The seven sacred circles that a couple takes around the holy fire is not just a wedding ritual but the seven vows ensuring that nothing can divide their relationship. Drawing of *aum*, *swastik* and parrots connotes that all of them are the witnesses of an occasion. During the consecration or housewarming ceremony of a new house, *Chitre* depicts Lord Ganesh, priest, family members, *aum*, *swastik*, etc.

In *dehra* and *Bangdwari*, illustration on the main gate is very important. Beautiful vines of leaves and red, blue or pink flowers are drawn on both sides of the doors and windows. Words like *Swagatam* (welcome) or *aum* etc. are written in the centre. Light vines are made around windows. *Panch Bhikham dehra* is one of the important depictions of Kangra. *Panch Bhikham*, a local fair is organized in Kangra in the beginning of winter. During the five-day festival, the locals visit the temple of Jayanti Devi and the Tulsi

3. Depiction  
of Bangdwari  
and Radha Krishna [7]





4. Depiction of Bangdwari and Ganpati [5]

plant is worshipped connoting the wedding ceremony of Goddess Tulsi with Lord Vishnu. On this occasion, *dehra* is written on Tulsi pot kept in the courtyard.

#### Technique of Bangdwari

Natural colours of vegetal or mineral origin, readily available in the area are generally used in *Bangdwari*. There has been a tradition of using *kusumadhi* colours, natural colours meant for dyeing strings, turbans, and *dhoti* which are used after mixing them with *saresh* or acacia gum. White lime, green, blue, pink or yellow-coloured distemper is applied as a base coating on the walls, followed by drawing of figures. In many houses, local ochre or light white/ yellow clay is also used as base coating. While making *Bangdwari* on the main door and windows, the painter first draws graphs using cotton soaked in indigo. Then the drawing is made with charcoal or pencil. Occasionally, colours are applied directly with a brush. In *Bangdwari* painting, red, blue, orange, pink, and white-coloured flowers are made and shades of white or yellow are applied to these flowers. After this, vines of green leaves with few fully-open and half-open buds are drawn. Green-coloured parrots with long tails and orange stripes around their necks are drawn around vines.

*Dehra* is generally circular, hexagonal or square-shaped. Lord Ganesh is depicted wearing a yellow *dhoti* and crown studded with gems on the head, holding a plate of *laddus* in one hand, *Gandaisa* in another hand, garland in the third hand and the fourth hand with *abhaya mudra* (blessing hand). The bride and groom are shown in scarlet attire. The bride is depicted wearing traditional attire and jewellery. The bride and groom are shown standing in front of a *Havan Kund*, the sacred fire. The groom is illustrated wearing a *dhoti* and *kurta*. Priest along with parents and relatives are shown in front. *Mandap*, a pavilion or tent of banana trees or bamboo with *havan kund* in the centre is also depicted with Garuda on the top, and parrots sitting below it. On the right and left, sun and moon are drawn. At the top, *aum*, *swastik* and marriage wish or marriage date are written. Apart from this, gods, goddesses, animals, birds etc. are also drawn on outside walls, which are first sketched and then coloured.

According to Kangra's local artist Dhaniram, to fill colour in the design, the artists used to tie cotton or small cloth in front of thin sticks which acted like a brush for *likhnu* or *Bangdwari*. He further explained that the hair of buffalo or horse tail were used for making brushes. For detailed work, brushes of hair

5. A rural lady drawing *likhnu* around the traditional hearth in a kitchen

6. *Panetar*, given to the artist before starting *Bangdwari*, as token for his work



of calf's squirrel, mongoose ears or hair of cat's tail were used. Earlier the brush sticks were made of bamboo or palm wood. The wood was cut into pen-sized lengths and later trampled with a stone at one end. Within no time this wood assumed the shape of a tooth. Traditionally, brushes were made by tying animal hair with thread at the tip of thin bamboo sticks. Nowadays, synthetic brushes are used.

Before making *likhnu*, a coating of lime is applied on the surface of the wall using a palm-leaf brush or a big broom, also known as *kuchi* or *judhi*. Its length is about three feet. The lime paste is prepared by using water, to which *saresh* gum is added so that it can adhere to the surface of the wall. Lime is believed to prevent the entry of insects into the house. Dry lime powder is also used for writing or courtyard drawing.

*Saresh* or *babul* gum are mixed with colours used for *Bangdwari* painting. Gum is prepared using the animal fat, skin and hoofs of dead animals. Babul gum is extracted from the acacia tree. Later, gum is added to colours and boiled in water.

Colours for dying stings or sacred threads are available in the form of powder at grocery shops and are used in the paintings. Some artists add glue to these colours and then use it in *Bangdwari* paintings. The most commonly used colours are red, yellow, pink,

etc. According to a *Bangdwari* artist, these colours are called *kusumadhi* colours in the local dialect and are obtained from natural sources. The pink colour is obtained from ripened hawthorn fruits, which grow on the banks of the local rivers of Kangra. Indigo is used for making a blue colour and is applied by mixing it with glue. *Multani mitti* or Fuller's earth is generally used as ochre yellow and has a fragrant smell. It is used to beautify *Bangdwari* paintings and clay utensils. In *Bangdwari* depiction, it is applied after mixing with gum. Indian red or brown *hironji* powder is available in the grocery stores and in *Bangdwari* painting, it is used after mixing with gum. For decorating courtyards, it is mixed with cow dung.

*Golma* is a white-coloured stone which after grinding gives white colour. It is excavated from the nearby mountains. *Golma* is used for painting attics of houses, verandas and courtyards. According to local artist Hemraj Choudhary, it is obtained from *Bhitlu*, a mining site in Kangra district.

Black colour is obtained from *kajal* (kohl). *Kajal* is prepared at the household level by placing the linseed oil lamp under a big plate or slate. When oil burns, it produces soot which gets deposited on the surface of the plate or slate and is scratched. It is also used by mixing with glue. *Dalei* is yellow or saffron-coloured



7. Local artist making dehra

8. Flour painting using rice paste





9. Bangdwari vine around doors and windows

10. Bangdwari vine around doors and windows

local clay used for making *likhnu* in the kitchen. The water-soaked yellow clay is stored in a vessel for instant use.

*Chalith* is a thick white-coloured rice paste. Eighty percent of *likhnu* in Kangra use *chalith* to enhance the beauty of the painting. It is applied on the surface with the help of cotton swabs/bud or at times directly with fingers. No glue is added to it.

Green is the most commonly used colour and is extracted from the leaves. According to an elderly lady, the earlier green colour was prepared using *brahmi* leaves, which were crushed and their extract was used. The green colour was obtained by mixing indigo and yellow powder to which gum was added. Apart from this, green oxide is also used by mixing it with glue. The green colour used in cow dung is easily available in grocer's shops. Green powder is mixed with cow dung for smearing on the floors of verandas and rooms, which is locally known as "*lehn ferna*". On green surface, drawings are made using *chalith*,

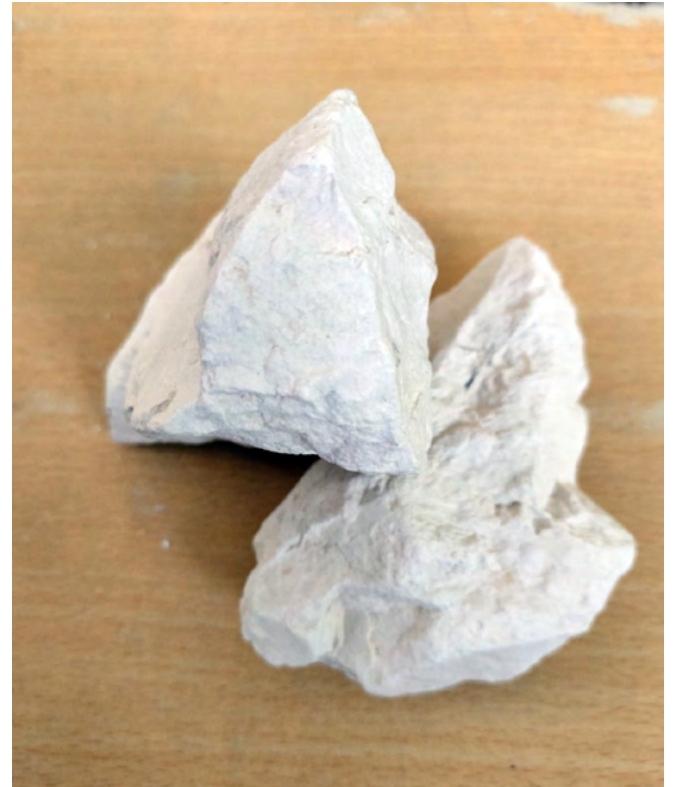
the white-coloured rice paste. In this, shapes like *swastik*, hexagons, triangles, circles and the feet of gods and goddesses are drawn.

Colours like vermilion, oxide green and blue indigo are also used in the *Bangdwari* made for marriage ceremony. Flowers are made using vermilion and indigo and leaves using green oxide. Bansari parrots are drawn on both sides of the *chatra*. The groom is depicted wearing a light bluish-white *kurta-pajama*. *Sehra* is tied on the head. Groom's relative in a turban and saffron-coloured *kurta-pajama*, is depicted holding a face balm in his hands. The bride is depicted wearing a red-coloured dress and her face is covered with a veil. The bride's relatives are depicted holding her. The bride and groom are portrayed holding garlands in their hands. A bamboo pavilion is shown on which parrots are sitting. In the centre of the pavilion, the bride and groom are displayed tied with *chandua*, a red cloth or a red string. Hari Krishna Murari, a distinguished scholar of *Pahari* literature from Rait

11. Locally prepared brushes using local grasses used for applying colours on wall



12. Lime, used as white colour



13. Acacia gum used as colour adhesive



14. Saresh gum used as colour adhesive



15. Locally prepared green colour



16. Locally prepared yellow colour





17. Locally prepared pink colour

18. Locally prepared Indigo blue

19. Multani mitti or Fuller's earth

20. Black colour obtained from kajal (kohl)



village of Kangra, says that *chandua* is tied at the time of marriage following the positioning of the sun and moon. On the other hand, Hemraj Chaudhary, belonging to village Ketlu, Rajol district Kangra, says that it is known as *chandni*. According to him, this cloth is linked with god, birds, parrots, and all those who are witnessing the event. Hemraj Chaudhary further explains that when *dehra* is made, the deity of the house locally called *kulj* is instituted at first instance. Another form of *likhnu* is seen on the earthen pots decorated by local potters of Kangra. The potters, grind clay and coloured stones and apply the same on the pottery to beautify it. Madan Lal and his wife Santosh Kumari, residents of village Bhedi, Tehsil Kangra, reveal that they use *banni*, *patralu* lime and black-coloured clay to make drawings on clay utensils.

### Symbols and motifs

The motifs and symbols of *dehra* include *aum*, *swastik*, parrots, *garuda*, fish, cow, chakor, wrestlers in wrestling positions, deer, tiger, elephant, horse, sun, moon, Lord Ganesh, Shiv, etc., which are painted on the walls according to the occasion.

**Symbolic significance of Bangdwari.** *Bangdwari* is a visual treat for the eyes for it makes use of vibrant natural colours and draws themes from the natural world. Different types of colours and symbols are used in *Bangdwari*, each having its significance; red and orange, for instance, are believed to be the colour of love and velour, blue symbolises innocence and eternity, green connotes prosperity and the beginning of life. Similarly, there are numerous shapes, each having a different meaning:

— Geometrical: Dots, circles, lines, triangle.

21. **Depiction of women carrying water pots for fetching water.**

Bangdwari painting.

Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

Photo:

S. Chaudhary, P. Gupta





22. **Depiction of wrestlers wrestling on the auspicious occasions in bangdwari.**  
Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.  
Photo:  
S. Chaudhary, P. Gupta

**23. Depiction of peacock  
in bangwari.**

Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

Photo:

S. Chaudhary, P. Gupta



**24. Depiction of pheasant  
in bangwari.**

Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

Photo:

S. Chaudhary, P. Gupta





25. **Depiction of parrots in bangwari.**

Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

Photo:

S. Chaudhary, P. Gupta

26. **Depiction of chakor pheasant in bangwari.**

Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

Photo:

S. Chaudhary, P. Gupta



**27. Depiction of tiger  
in bangwari.**

Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

Photo:

S. Chaudhary, P. Gupta



**28. Depiction of deer  
in bangwari.**

Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

Photo:

S. Chaudhary, P. Gupta



- Mythological: *Swastik*, trident, disc, *aum*, kalash.
  - Natural: Sun, moon, stars, water, fire, etc.
  - Ecological: Trees, plants (Tulsi: holy basil), fruits, leaves, animals, birds, creatures, parrots, peacocks, cows, serpents, etc.
  - Sacred: Local deities, gods, goddesses, etc.
  - Human: Bride, groom, priest, etc.
- The meaning of some symbols used in *Bangdwari* are:
- Circle represents both time and space. The dot in its centre represents the origin.
  - Dot represents three gods Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, the supreme truth, from which everything originates and merges.
  - Fish symbolises fertility, prosperity and good luck.
  - Hexagon is a union of feminine and masculine.
  - Parrot symbolises the witness of the event.
  - Peacock represents love and beauty.
  - Pentagon represents five elements (ether, earth, water, fire and sky).
  - Snake, a folk deity is linked with water bodies and represents fertility.
  - Square is a symbolises of order, stability and a symbol of sky and earth.
  - Triangle symbolises three dimensions of time: past, present and future.

Of the various symbols and motifs used in *Bangdwari*, *swastik* is one of the most powerful, having deep-rooted spiritual connotations. The word 'swastik', finds its origin in Sanskrit which means well-being. As an ancient motif, it has varied significance across diverse cultures and civilizations, including the Indian, European, Asian, and American. The bending of its arms at right angles symbolises the enduring cycle of inception, sustenance, and destruction. As a symbol, *swastik* encapsulates the divine vibrations of *aum*, the cosmic sound, indicating the ultimate reality, consciousness, and existence. Its four arms symbolise the dissemination of wisdom in all directions; embody four *purusharthas* — *dharm* (righteousness), *arth* (wealth), *kaam* (desires), and *moksh* (liberation); four stages of life — *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *grihasth* (householder), *vanaprasth* (retreat from materialistic world), and *sannyasa* (renunciation) and four *varnas* of social order. *Swastik* is integral to every household ritual and is revered for conferring *shakti* (power) to a house and encapsulates the essence of Indian civilization. It is usually drawn before starting any ritual worship in an area earmarked for performing the same to invoke divine blessings of the presiding deity for successfully organizing the event. In addition to *swastik*, *aum* is another important sacred symbol used in the *Bangdwari*. It symbolises the universe and the ultimate truth. At the beginning of the creation, *Aum* is believed to have emerged from emptiness as a primordial sound that echoes in the newly-created universe. It is the main intonation used as an invocation, or prayer and recited repeatedly. It also

represents the three aspects of God, viz. the Brahma (A), the Vishnu (U), and the Mahesh (M).

Sacred symbols and the gods represent diverse facets and manifestations of the single divine energy. Lord Ganesh is portrayed in *Bangdwari* as a symbol of the presiding deity and as an icon of human consciousness. The elephant head is regarded as a symbol of magnitude and strength, which has infinite potential, greatness, and generosity. The head of Lord Ganesh signifies thinking big. Lord Ganesh is a god of intellect and wisdom and is regarded as the most knowledgeable and intellectual deity. The large ear signifies listening, understanding, and acting accordingly. The smallmouth shows speaking less and good words. Likewise, the tusk indicates adapting to the good and discarding the bad. The long trunk is symbolic of strength and adjustability. The depiction of the sun and moon connotes diverse facets across cultures; however, polarity is common among all. The sun symbolises determination, strength and supremacy while the moon represents serenity, beauty, and nurturing.

### Discussion

Art is a manifestation of human ingenuity — a mode to express human feelings that assumes the form of paintings, sculpture, music, dance, literature, etc. The simplest art in any society is wall painting or murals. The exact date of its beginning cannot be established, but these have been in practice since eras [8]. The art of wall painting is not just an expression of creativity but a ritual in itself. Prehistoric man used to paint the walls of caves using natural colouring material carved sculptures out of bones, etched figures and symbols on rock, and left the expression of his ingenuity and daily life that are still available [9]. The rock paintings and temple-mural traditions altogether acquired a different attribute when the base and medium of paintings switched over from rocks to walls of houses and temples. Most of the painting traditions originated in specific regions governed by geography and climate and shaped by distinct regional cultures [10]. *Bangdwari* is believed to have developed from the rock art of primitive times. Rock art consists of paintings, drawings, engravings, stencils, and figures in rock caves. India houses one of the richest, and most diverse repositories of rock art. Prehistoric rock paintings, rock-cut architectures of caves & temples, and sculptures carved out of rock are the examples of rock art. It is often of three types, viz. petroglyphs (carved into the rock surface); pictographs (painted onto the surface), and earth figures (formed on the ground). Petroglyphs were generally made on rocks and their relics can be traced on the walls of the caves across India. Petroglyphs depicting hunting scenes and dancing human figures were the main themes in the rock art of Jammu and Kashmir [11]. Petroglyphs

29. **Depiction of fish  
in bangdwari.**

Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

Photo:

S. Chaudhary, P. Gupta



in Karnataka depict figures of cattle, deer, and hunting scenes [12; 13]. With time, the technique and motifs modify and include linear representations, in green and dark red [14]. The walls of rock caves were made of quartzite; hence, minerals were used as pigments. The Mesolithic period witnessed the use of red colour with a variety of themes and paintings of smaller sizes and the hunting scenes remained predominant during this period. The Mesolithic artists treasured depicting animals and social life. Moreover, the handprints, fist prints, and dots made with the fingertips can also be found.

*Bangdwari* as a folk tradition of Kangra and its cultural heritage, has constantly evolved, adapted, and reinvented itself. With the passage of time, the colours, themes and techniques of *Bangdwari* got modified and nowadays, the oil paints and acrylic paints are used. *Bangdwari* paintings are not naturalistic but pictorial and symbolic representations of rituals, ceremonies, and routine activities. Mountain communities in the inaccessible valleys remained attached to each other through rituals, and special ways of celebrating life and its sacraments, viz. birth, marriage, first haircut and piercing of the earlobes, etc., and *Bangdwari* paintings added to the joy of these auspicious occasions. The hallmark of *Bangdwari* is its simplicity for it depicts the

simple beliefs of the community and gives information about the myths, religious beliefs, epics, customs, and rituals. These paintings were not made to earn a livelihood but to invoke the divine blessings for family, healthy progeny, and protection from evil forces.

The artists and patrons of *Bangdwari* traditions are identified with particular communities residing in Kangra; hence paintings of *Bangdwari* traditions are not universally made but remain confined to Kangra hills. These paintings never took into account the ratio and proportion of figures, rather these were more like free-hand drawings, which resemble similar folk arts of other Indian states, like *Phad* painting of Rajasthan, which describes the deeds of regional hero-gods. Likewise, Puri paintings in the state of Odisha were made by *chitrakars*, a class of painters.

*Bangdwari*, thus reflects Kangra's rich spiritual and cultural heritage and is important for its creators, curators and their descendants. Its exquisiteness and symbolism must be appreciated and treasured because its sustained existence is important to recognize and understand its origin and evolution and its relationship with the landscape it has survived. *Bangdwari* is not just a "historical record" but a living tradition that has survived and portrayed the lifestyle of rural communities.

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