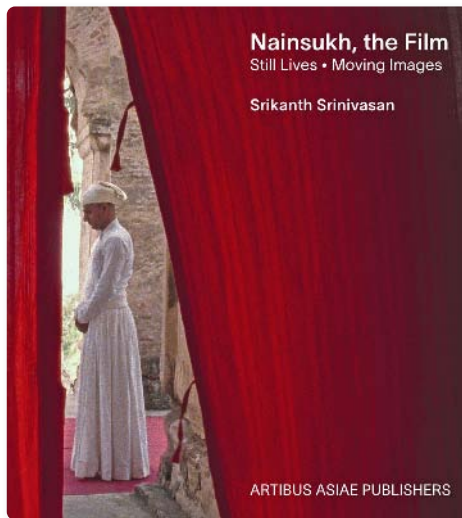


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WEAVING OF VARIED ARTISTIC STRANDS



NAINSUKH, THE FILM STILL LIVES • MOVING IMAGES

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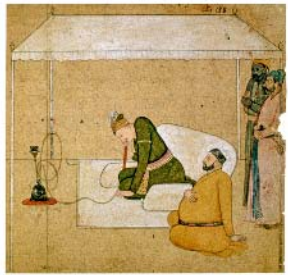
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Prof. B.N. Goswamy's profound exploration of Indian miniatures is celebrated, with a focus on the monograph *Nainsukh of Guler*. The review, while paying tribute to the him, highlights the meticulous analysis of the film's creation, emphasizing the collaboration between the original book, anthropologist *Eberhard Fischer*, and filmmaker *Amit Dutta*. The narrative provides a comprehensive understanding of the film's essence and its alignment with the historical and artistic context.

The scholar, researcher, art historian, and lover of poetry and music, Prof. Brijinder Nath Goswamy [BNG], who was behind the discovery of Nainsukh the painter, passed away on November 17 in Chandigarh, leaving a huge void in the realm of appreciating visual arts and their interconnectedness to life as a whole. BNG had his most ingenious way of narrating the stories that he saw in visual arts. For instance, he would enter into the minutest of miniature paintings of the size of 1.5" X 2.25" as it were to explore the events, episodes, and landscapes to rediscover anew-his own-way of perceiving the magic and wonder of this world in all forms of art. He connected these events from across time and history to literature in Persian, Urdu, Sanskrit, Hindi, and local dialects, especially through poetry for "... a very great understanding of deep human emotions." He remarkably and eloquently recited the poetry of even a contemporary poet like Ali Sardar Jaffri to appreciate the miniature paintings done in the 17th CE for the timelessness of human emotions that manifested in them. He truly pursued the research in visual arts and its appreciation as part of Indian culture like the great Ananda Coomaraswamy, whom he quotes thus, "You take from a work of art what you bring to it", and says, "It is not a question of "what is in art, but what art does to you." In that, he underlines the importance of our encounter with art which potentially sets off ripples of imagination and exploration within ourselves. He was worried, "We are remarkably, visually illiterate...you have to enter- visually enter a work of art". It is only then that we begin to respect the subtlety built in by the patron and the artist together. He urges us "to approach the work of art softly, gently...breathe gently here".

His lifelong passionate and rigorous research into Indian miniatures is a precious gift he leaves behind as if for us to know that advancement in science and technology, idolized out of proportion, can leave this planet barren and devoid of emotion if all arts are considered useless and hence unimportant, or as a form of non-utilitarian entertainment, rather than revering arts holistically for their invaluable and perpetual exploration of the human spirit. He says, that if we overlook the “...intelligence and daring in the painter” we will miss the insight, for instance, of “the unfolding of the mystery of the night” in a painting depicting the love between Radha and Krishna. In the “5000 or more miniature paintings...” that he carried on his laptop, he not only

2 Pahari Painting and its Contexts



THE WORLD OF THE HILLS
The term of *Pahari* is derived from the Sanskrit word *parvata* which means mountain. It is a term used to describe the paintings of the Pahari region, which were produced in the hills of the Indian subcontinent. The Pahari paintings are characterized by their vibrant colors and intricate details. They often depict scenes of daily life, religious events, and mythological stories. The Pahari paintings are a unique blend of Indian and Persian art, and they are highly valued for their artistic and historical significance.

4 Nainsukh, the Film



BERNHARD FISCHER AND PAHARI PAINTING
In 1950, a young German scholar accompanied his father, the art historian, to the Pahari region. He was struck by the beauty of the paintings and the people. He spent several years in the region, studying the art and the culture. He was particularly interested in the Pahari paintings, which he found to be a unique blend of Indian and Persian art. He was also struck by the vibrant colors and intricate details of the paintings. He spent several years in the region, studying the art and the culture. He was particularly interested in the Pahari paintings, which he found to be a unique blend of Indian and Persian art. He was also struck by the vibrant colors and intricate details of the paintings.

explored the stories that emerged from his scholarship, but also from his equally alert visual consciousness of the use and meaning of color, compositions, figures, and detail. His acute sensibility helped in connecting the seasonal changes, their impact on human feeling, the sacredness of life, events, and encounters with fellow beings, as well as flora and fauna, and the elements, that manifested in the paintings. BNG has vividly discussed in his several books ‘a layered world of miniatures’ varying in size, color, treatment, and the subjects in the different genres including portraits of persons in differing moods and ages, informal portraits, tiger hunts, battles & sieges, landscapes, royal courts of kings, activities in private and public courtyards, gods & goddesses, sacred journeys, love & longing and so forth that include such numerous events and rituals in day to day life of people of India that may depict vividly her cultural heritage. He was not only ‘seeing and hearing’ a work of art but also resonating it from within at the same time. We are cautioned, “There are moments which are sudden, for which we are not prepared to receive.” The journey undertaken by BNG will undoubtedly inspire the following generations of scholars, artists, and poets to continually rediscover ‘the infinite potential’ of the arts for human existence.

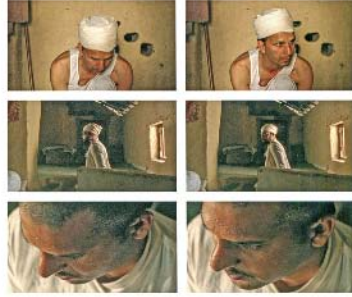
The monograph *Nainsukh, The Film* is a narrative that aims to “analyze what the film is and how it is so, rather than how it came to be.” The challenging task for the author of the monograph Srikanth Srinivasan was to critically look at the confluence of three major creative streams immersed in researching the topic in their own distinctly creative ways in the process of making the film, Nainsukh. First and

foremost of the streams was the original book by the same name [*Nainsukh of Guler: A Great Indian Painter from a Small Hill State*] by B.N. Goswamy, which in itself is an exemplifying work throwing light on the successive generations of a family of painters, each contributing to the rich tradition of miniature painting, secondly, collaborating closely with Eberhard Fischer, an anthropologist-art historian-advisor, and writer of the film, based in Switzerland, who had collaborated previously with BNG on several books and exhibitions on the subject of Pahari paintings and was the motivating spirit behind the film, thirdly, to follow from within the enormously complex and beautiful process that converted it into a film, which has been receiving impressive reviews

For the first time, it was the film that brought these artists to the world stage. The book, which is a beautiful and comprehensive study of the art of the region, is a must-read for anyone interested in Indian art. The book is a beautiful and comprehensive study of the art of the region, is a must-read for anyone interested in Indian art. The book is a beautiful and comprehensive study of the art of the region, is a must-read for anyone interested in Indian art.



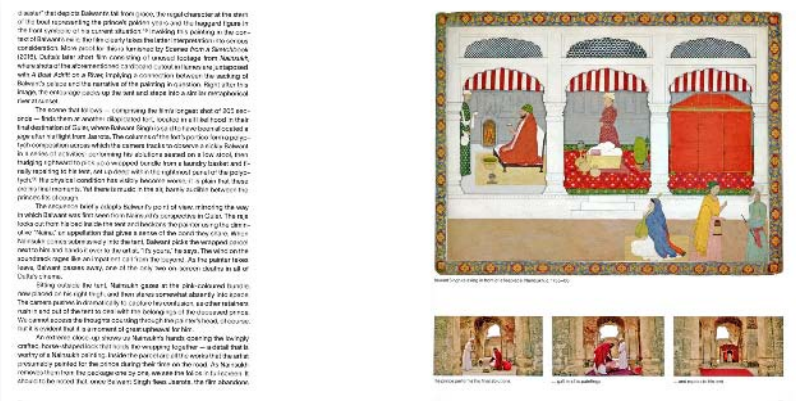
When the film was made, it was the original book by the same name [*Nainsukh of Guler: A Great Indian Painter from a Small Hill State*] by B.N. Goswamy, which in itself is an exemplifying work throwing light on the successive generations of a family of painters, each contributing to the rich tradition of miniature painting, secondly, collaborating closely with Eberhard Fischer, an anthropologist-art historian-advisor, and writer of the film, based in Switzerland, who had collaborated previously with BNG on several books and exhibitions on the subject of Pahari paintings and was the motivating spirit behind the film, thirdly, to follow from within the enormously complex and beautiful process that converted it into a film, which has been receiving impressive reviews



around the world, by the talented director Amit Dutta and his crew that included his co-writer wife Ayswarya Sankaranarayan, and cinematographer, Mrinal Desai. Finally, the monograph in its own right is an essay by the author who witnesses the making of the film by “venturing voluntarily to enter the director’s world and his way of representing it, by experiencing the process of the shooting of the film”. The author says, “The present volume seeks to walk the reader through the worlds of both Nainsukh the painter and Nainsukh the film...” and it hopes to “enable the reader to look at the enchanting, enigmatic, singular film with a comparable sense of delight and wonder...”

The monograph has been very systematically organized to communicate the author’s analytical approach to the process of film-making. Various aspects of the film – the subject Nainsukh and his paintings, associated characters, the chosen locations for shooting, the environmental and architectural ambiance, and their authenticity in time and history, all become as important as the role the sound and light play in the biopic. The author also unfolds in his narrative where the original text of the writings of B.N. Goswamy mattered critically, and the deviations from the former ‘happened’, in the course of film-making. The narrative informs the reader how the author familiarises himself with Pahari paintings, the environment in which Nainsukh and his family’s art blossomed, progressed, and transformed, and the collaborative creative effort of film-making between the director and the writer-producer of the film Eberhard Fischer.

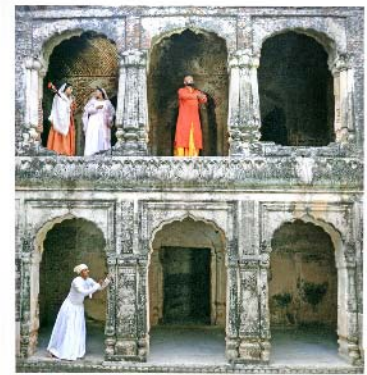
The ‘Organization of Book’ tells us that “*Nainsukh* the film takes center stage in chapter five”. The second chapter deals with “a brief survey of the political, social, economic, and artistic conditions that shaped the development of painting in the Punjab hills.” The third chapter examines the changes that happened to Pahari art at the turn of the seventeenth century and Nainsukh’s early life, and the profile of his patron Balwant Singh of Jarota. BNG’s observations like ‘Some sacrifice of emotions in favor of prettiness, of intensity in favor of clarity’ or ‘the lowest common denominator, a commonness of feeling, which marked the work of a family throughout several



generations...’ are very helpful for the reader in comprehending the evolution of the family’s art. The fourth chapter looks at the groundwork done for the film by the director Amit Dutta and Fischer. It is the sixth chapter that gives us the author’s “stylistic interrogation of *Nainsukh*, delving into numerous interactions between the film’s form and that of the Guler master’s works.”

The book, therefore, is a laudable effort for its literary merit, and an engaging narrative of the entire process. Eberhard Fischer the versatile producer himself, whose idea it was to think of this monograph claims ‘no knowledge of the process of film-making’ and looks at it as an opportunity ‘...to stay for some time in this strange world, permitted to look around and absorb slowly what we see and hear’. The fact that the author was familiar with director Amit Dutta’s previous work having written on him in the past may have been helpful, as much as was the director’s familiarity with the place where Nainsukh himself lived and worked. The author in his opening note explains that he rejected “the journalistic approach of interviewing participants, piercing testimonies...” and “Focus is instead on Nainsukh, the object itself, the vast historical knowledge it condenses and its particular cinematic lineage. The aim of this monograph is, therefore, to analyze what the film is, and how it is so, rather than how it came to be.” Like the film, the book too could not have happened without Fischer’s initiative and support.

Chapter five has been termed ‘Scene by Scene’. The ‘Stylistic Analysis’ in Chapters 6 and 7 along with the appendices should perhaps be of great interest to anyone interested in knowing what is meant by authenticity and abiding by the text in a biopic such as this film. The issue of authenticity leads to a wide range of issues not simply finding actors who ‘look like’ the characters portrayed in the book, or the details of their attires but also the crucial process of film editing. The entire ambiance and setting would be of great significance to the story. We learn that ‘the screenplay is reverse engineering from forty-two of his paintings.’



Particularly equally engaging are appendices 3 and 4, included after chapter seven, which narrate Eberhard Fischer’s own ‘first report’ dealing with his passionate involvement in this endeavor ‘as the initiator and also as the art historical advisor of the film project’. This monograph may be looked at as a historical document in itself. Fischer confirms in his notes, “All the scenes mirror episodes depicted in paintings by Nainsukh are based on the information provided by inscriptions by the painter or by one of his contemporaries...Nainsukh’s family workshop, for instance, was recreated for the film in the ancient town of Haripur...” further he writes his thoughts, “to impersonate Nainsukh, a trained and practicing young miniature painter would possibly turn out to be the best choice...” Accordingly, the choice fell on Manish Soni from Bhilwara in Rajasthan, from a well-known family of miniature painters to play the character of Nainsukh. Appendix 4 gives ‘Shot Divisions’, which should be of interest to any filmmaker and Appendix 5 gives a wonderful collection of the stills from the process of film-making. Surely, the enormity of the project of pursuing the life and works of Nainsukh, right up to the film-making, followed by this monograph ‘is a work a hundred years in the making’! On the whole, the book should be of interest to the art world in general and particularly to those who appreciate the interconnectedness of various art forms.



Nainsukh [2010]

*Film Directed by Amit Dutta
Produced by Museum Rietberg Zurich
and Eberhard Fischer
Language: Kangri, Dogri
with English subtitles
Run time: 90 minutes*

*The film premiered at the 67th
Venice International Film Festival
in 2010, where it was received by
Film Comment as one of top 10
films shown*